The Children of the Moon and the Sun

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The Children of the Moon and the Sun

by UhohUbby

Summary

It takes two to wish a baby out of the sky. Girls left by the moon, boys left by the sun. Fifteen years ago- after a whirlwind romance that left a trail of bodies behind -Will and Hannibal wished not one, but two, babies into their lives.

After settling into a quiet life in Baltimore, Will and Hannibal live double lives. Hannibal is the well-liked, probably widowed, benefactor to the Baltimore arts. Will is the weird, twitchy little teacher with no friends and only dogs for family. The Ripper rips and Will dutifully builds a profile that doesn't resemble his husband in the slightest. Nobody knows they have children, much less children together.

When events beyond their control bring them and their children into the limelight, how can they possibly adjust? With a child-killer on the loose, Will and Hannibal are desperate to keep things as they've always been: safe.

DO NOT REPOST TO ANOTHER SITE. No podfics.

Notes

This fic starts off very light, but does get progressively more violent as it goes. There will be off-screen violence against children. If that sort of thing bothers you, please turn back now.

Fifteen Years Ago

Chapter Summary

This is a flashback chapter, and contains less detail than future chapters.

Will grunted as his back violently slammed into the doorframe. Hannibal was upon him, all grabbing hands and teeth. The blood on their hands was dry and tacky, but he didn't care. Hannibal didn't even bat an eye when Will pulled him and his stupid suit down into the vicera and gore an hour ago. Even after they cleaned up, torched the crime scene, he was gone; his amber eyes blown and his smile feral.

"*I see you,*" Will had said.

Hannibal went to his knees in the open chest cavity and fucked Will there. Will just laughed. Hannibal hated stripping of his plastic suit, of going lax on his forensic countermeasures. Will horny and handsy seemed to be his only weakness. A bat of his baby-blues sent Hannibal head-over-ass into lust.

Head knocking against the wood, Will moaned. He was sore from their kill, tired from their last round. He tried to wiggle out of Hannibal's grasp. He couldn't handle another round against a rough surface.

Hannibal bit Will's shoulder hard enough to draw blood for his trouble.

Will moaned. He shivered. The pain hurt so *good.* "Bed," Will urged, trying to push Hannibal into the bedroom while also tugging desperately at the older man's waistcoat.

They didn't get to the bed.

(They never made it to the bed.)

Hannibal took him savagely on the carpet in the foyer. Will's hands and knees burned from the friction. His hips ached from where Hannibal dug his fingers in. A cursed, "*Mine*," under Hannibal's breath.

Will moaned softly into the rough rug. He nodded along, his empathy making him agree.

The rest of the night passed in a haze of bites and bruises.

Will clung desperately. Relishing in the closeness. Even more so than usual, knowing that it would be the last time.

Will woke to a quiet morning. Florence always seemed asleep in Hannibal's upper-class neighborhood. Will bit back a grunt of pain as he rolled onto his stomach. He glanced at the ostentatious clock on the wall. Ten in the morning. Will ran his hand through his curls.

His flight left at five.

He should go.

He *should.*

Will glanced at the sleeping man next to him. They were close in age. Hannibal twenty-three to Will's twenty. The month-long trip to Europe had been his father's idea. Beau Graham died a month prior. And, as he lay dying in a hospital bed, he said, "*I want you to go. Just once, Willy. Go see where I met her*."

Beau and Will's mother met in Florence. A summer fling that turned into more. She hadn't wanted Will, but her family was too Catholic for her to keep him. She and Beau weren't married. In the end, Beau and baby Will went to the states, alone, the following January. Beau never told Will her name.

A day after the funeral, Will left for Italy.

Two days later, he stumbled upon *Il Monstro* in the act, right upon the shore of the Arno.

They had sex for the first time that night, and nearly every night since.

Hannibal showed him the city. Wined and dined him. As a recent med-school graduate, Hannibal intended to fully enjoy the break between exams and the beginning of his residency. Will seemed to be the heart of his indulgences. Hedonistic Hannibal would have Will any way he could.

On the porch.

In the back of his car.

In the hallway.

On the floor in the kitchen.

On the table.

Will had hoped to find something here. He expected peace for his father, maybe. An end to his grief. He found Hannibal instead.

"What are you thinking of that has your brow pinched so tight?" Hannibal asked, his voice sleep-rough.

Will pursed his lips. Hannibal looked handsome, his blond hair messy and his amber eyes content. Hannibal always looked like the cat that caught the canary. Delighted to have Will

next to or under him. Will looked away. He didn't want to see Hannibal's hurt; it would make him want to stay more than he already did. "My flight is today."

A long, tense silence. A gentle hand on his stomach. "You could stay," Hannibal murmured.

Will shook his head slowly. He swallowed. "I should go home," he said quietly.

Hannibal's hand found Will's under the sheets and squeezed. "We could build a home here. A life. You can see it too," he murmured. "We are compatible, Will. I would love you, if you would have me."

Will closed his eyes.

Love.

Love .

Did he love Hannibal?

It felt like it last night, when he watched Hannibal charm old Italian women at the opera. He saw a peek of it in Hannibal's secret *"Aren't these people the worst?"* smiles. Will felt it bubble in his stomach and up his throat when Hannibal ripped a man's jaw from his chin and flayed his tongue into the shape of a flower. It blinded him when he was face down, ass up, gaze focused on nothing as Hannibal fucked him into the floor.

"I need to finish my degree," Will said weakly.

"Your credits could be easily transferred," Hannibal replied.

Will sighed. "It'll be expensive."

Hannibal waved a hand at the room around them. "I have more than enough to spare, mylimasis."

Will flushed. He knew an endearment when he heard one, even if he didn't speak Hannibal's native tongue. "I can't," he said again, weakly.

Quietly, Hannibal sat up. He stared down at Will, blond hair falling into his eyes. They studied one another. Will had the distinct impression that Hannibal took his features to memory. He'd already drawn Will, and claimed the younger man would hold the head seat at the table in his memory palace forever.

Hannibal looked away. Hurt flashing in his eyes.

Will winced.

It cut like a knife.

“I will make us coffee,” he murmured. Hannibal slid from the sheets. He tucked his satin robe around himself and retreated to the safety of the kitchen.

Only once he’d left did Will let tears drip down his cheeks.

He had to go.

He had to.

This wasn’t Will Graham’s life. He was a weird, twitchy little man. He had three dogs. An old car that never ran right. He avoided eye contact and kept his head down. He didn’t *belong* on the arm of a man like Hannibal.

If he closed his eyes he could imagine it.

Staying.

A life of bespoke suits and fancy dinner parties. Nights of bloodshed and a warm body next to his under the sheets. Life next to a man who relished in Will’s darkness. Who encouraged his violence and petty vindictiveness. Who fondly called him a *terror* and stroked a gentle hand down his cheek.

It wouldn’t last.

Will opened his eyes. They would get caught, or more accurately, Will would do something stupid and impulive that got *Hannibal* caught.

Will gathered his things quietly. He packed light to begin with. He abandoned his hotel room in favor of Hannibal’s comfortable condo three weeks ago.

He couldn’t face Hannibal. Couldn’t see rejection and sorrow flash in his amber eyes. Will chose the way of the coward. He left through the back door.

Hannibal didn’t appear down the block.

He didn’t show his face in the airport.

Will’s heart ached as he boarded the plane.

He closed his eyes as the plane took to the sky.

Hannibal would never forgive him for this, Will knew. The man abhorred rudeness. Will, leaving without a word? Hannibal would *hate* it. Hate Will.

Once, when Beau was drunk on Will’s birthday, Will asked why Beau didn’t date anymore. He tried, once, when Will was in middle school. Never again. Beau teared up and said, “*It felt like I left my heart behind when we left. Never did find it again*.”

Will laughed bitterly.

Like father, like son.

Will left his heart in Florence, too.

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A week later, Maggie kept scratching on his back door. Will ignored her as long as he could. He didn't want to do anything. He laid down in the bed with sheets that were too cheap and didn't smell like bergamot and salt water. The house was too cold. Too empty. Surrounded by his dad's boxes and Will's books.

Maggie was the old mutt Beau got after Will left for college. She was a good dog. Sometimes, when she *really* had to go, she threw her head back and howled.

It must have been one of those times because Maggie howled up a storm.

"I'm comin'," Will mumbled. He pulled himself out of bed and across the room. He paused. There was something on the back porch.

It glowed faintly.

Carefully, Will cracked the door and stuck his head out.

The bundle waiting for him sent his heart to his throat.

A baby.

A *wished baby* .

Shushing the dogs, Will stood on his back stoop and squatted in front of the baby. She was small, her little hand visible through the moonlight blanket. A *she* for sure. Wished babies were girls if delivered in the night, boys if they came during the day.

Carefully, Will pushed the blanket out of her face.

A sleeping angel. She, like all babies wished into the world, wouldn't wake until touched by a parent. Until then, she could survive any weather. She'd stay warm and still until found. Bound by magic.

Carefully, Will lifted the glowing blanket out of its straw basket and held her to his chest. She had his hair; dark chocolate curls framed her chubby face. She had a glittering silver moon on her forehead. A crescent. Boys had a small golden circle, a sun, on their foreheads. Will ran a finger down her cheek and watched in fascination as her eyes fluttered open.

Sorrow choked him.

Amber.

Warm, dark amber.

Familiar amber.

The baby gurgled at him. Happy as a clam.

Will cried.

It took two to wish a baby out of the sky. Even a world away, Hannibal *had* wanted it. The idyllic family life with Will. That picture-perfect little family. Will turned tail and ran. Scared for Hannibal. Scared of himself.

He thought about his childhood. Of Beau's sad smile whenever his mother came up. He thought about how they hadn't been good enough. She never sought them out. Never mothered Will or put an end to Beau's heartache.

Little Will always wondered *why* .

Why hadn't they been enough?

Why didn't she want him?

Why didn't she *love* him?

He didn't want that for his daughter.

It took six months to get her vaccinated. Six months until she was big enough to fly across the sea. Six months for Will to work up the nerve. Little Florence was perfect; the best behaved baby in the world. As long as Will held her she didn't fuss. She didn't cry. She looked like Hannibal sometimes. She stared. Considering. Her head tipped to the side. A little baby predator.

Will loved her.

Florence drooled on his shoulder in the taxi. Will went straight from the airport to Hannibal's condo. He clutched her and his suitcase like a lifeline as he walked the stone path to the front door. It looked different in winter. Quieter, somehow.

Will beat down his nerves. He stood in the chilly nighttime air. He stared at the doorway. He swallowed.

Florence sneezed.

Will sighed, kissed the top of her head, and knocked on the door.

No answer. Just more quiet.

Will winced. Maybe he should wait until morning. Hannibal was probably still asleep. He considered knocking again, but he didn't want to upset the man. Just because Hannibal wished for Florence six months ago didn't mean he still wanted her. It didn't mean he wanted *Will.*

Before Will could retreat, the door swung open.

Hannibal stood there, bare chested and sleepy. His hair was mussed. Exhausted. He stared at Will in shock. Dark circles stained the skin under his eyes. He looked gaunt.

"You look like shit," Will blurted.

Hannibal snorted.

Someone whined.

Not Florence , Will's tired mind supplied.

He finally noticed the little boy in Hannibal's arms. He had sandy blond hair, and deep blue eyes. *Familiar* blue eyes. A golden sun stamped the middle of his forehead.

Will stared at the boy, and Hannibal stared at Florence.

Silently, Hannibal stepped aside to let them in.

Will sat on the couch in front of the fire. A bottle sat abandoned there. A rag, covered in spit-up. Will touched it.

"How old is he?" Will asked quietly.

Hannibal sat on the other end of the couch. He rubbed the little boy's back. "Six months, last Monday."

Will nodded jerkily. "Her, too."

Wished for at the same time. A world apart.

"What did you name her?" Hannibal asked.

Will's cheeks flushed. "Florence," he murmured.

Hannibal nodded. He kissed the boy's head. "Arno," he supplied.

"After the river?"

"Yes."

Hannibal looked down at the baby, who burped and smacked his lips. Hannibal smiled. "It seemed appropriate. His eyes are the same depthless blue, as the river is where we met."

Will nodded. Florence's name choice had been decided at the bottom of a bottle of whiskey with the same thoughts in mind.

Hannibal looked at him. Sad. Tired. *Hurt.* "Why are you here?" he asked quietly. Hesitation. "Do you intend to leave her with me?"

"No!" Will said quickly. He bit his lip. "I fucked up. I shouldn't have left."

"No," Hannibal agreed coolly. "You shouldn't have."

Will nodded. He looked at Hannibal. Perfect, dark, wonderful Hannibal. "I want to stay," he murmured. "I want to *try.*" He motioned between them. "This."

The set of Hannibal's jaw loosened. "For the children?" he inquired. "You needen't be *with* me for that."

Will said, "I know. I still want to try. All of it."

Hannibal considered him. Slowly, he nodded. "Very well."

Will frowned. "I-- that easily?" He expected more of a fight. Hannibal was an angry man by nature. Violent. Will didn't trust his easy forgiveness.

With shark eyes and thin lips, Hannibal promised, "I'll punish you for leaving, Will. But not now. Right now, we both need sleep." He stood, and he offered Will a hand. "Come, mano meilė. We should rest. We can speak in the morning."

Will took his hand.

An Unexpected Guest

Present Day

"This is delicious, Hannibal," Alana said, smile bright. She took another bite of the rude investment banker.

"Simply amazing!" Mr. Barcot, the head of the symphony board, agreed. "I haven't eaten food this fine since our trip to Paris last year. Truly, your talents lie in the culinary arts, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal preened under the praise.

He loved his dinner parties. The attention. The drama. The joy of creation. The fun of watching his guests unknowingly participate in his favorite hobby.

The night was a resounding success. Despite his guests having to brave a rainstorm, they all arrived on time. Mrs. DuPond found out about her husband's decade long affair, and Hannibal privately hoped she would kill the man before long. Anita Roe agreed to sing as the evening's entertainment. The young woman was new to the opera, and exceedingly talented. Hannibal loved her voice. Even Arno paid attention during her last performance, and he cared as much for the arts as his other father.

The little boy took after Will, preferring to get muddy in the river and handle fish with his bare hands. Hannibal's sweet Florence didn't enjoy singing, but took to dance like a fish to water. She loved the theatrics of it all, discussing the quality of the set pieces and the choreography at length every time.

Truly, their happy presences would be the only thing that could make this evening perfect. They agreed a decade ago, the night they left Italy behind, that their children would not see the limelight.

Will forbid it.

Hannibal and Will kept separate houses. One in Wolftap, and one in Baltimore. Hannibal and the children lived in Baltimore full-time, though Will often absconded with the twins on the weekends for hiking and camping trips. Hannibal enjoyed their family outings. He and Florence sat by the river on a blanket while Arno and Will got filthy. Hannibal taught her to draw, or she simply rested against him and watched.

Usually, Will joined them in Baltimore at night, though all too often his work kept him away.

Thinking of him, Hannibal stroked his thumb absently over his wedding ring. Hammered silver. Will casually slipped it onto Hannibal's finger one afternoon as they sat in the Uffizi

Gallery. Hannibal stared at him, awed into silence. Will snorted, patted his hand, and said, "*We've been together long enough. It was time*." His voice was casual. The flush of his ears and his hammering pulse gave him away.

A nagging sense of doubt tugged on his gut. He'd felt *off* all evening. He usually did, when the twins were out of sight, but even Hannibal had to admit it worse than usual. Due to his loss at a young age, he knew he was obsessive with their care. Too controlling. He didn't like not knowing where Florence and Arno were, even if for a scarce few hours. He put GPS trackers in their backpacks and their phones. Will just rolled his eyes when he found out. Will kissed Hannibal and said, "*If you need to know, that's fine.*"

Alana drew him out of his thoughts. "Are you alright?" she asked quietly.

Hannibal smiled, mask firmly in place. "Of course. I'm simply thinking of what must be done for the next course. Forgive me, Alana."

She returned his smile. The woman reached over and squeezed his hand. Emboldened by their years of friendship, no doubt. Most of Hannibal's dinner guests wouldn't presume to touch him. Hannibal absently wondered what she would think if she knew. She'd spoken to him of Will, of course. They ran in the same academic circles, brushing shoulders at conferences and occasionally in the halls of the FBI. Will seemed so sad and seemingly broken. Alana wanted to help. She wanted to be there for skittish, strange Will Graham.

Hannibal kept his smiles to himself. His dear, lovely William had claws. A vengeful and cruel creature. Protective to a fault. (Perfect.)

Hannibal enjoyed letting the rumors spin themselves into tall tales. Hannibal fueled the flames. He never spoke of Will overtly. He simply assumed a sad facade and said, *Another time, perhaps* , when pressed. He left the seat to his right empty at all hosted events. He left out cutlery and an empty plate. It made some think him widowed. Others, the victim of a once-sided divorce.

Really, Hannibal just wanted to make them wonder. Plus, painting the picture of grief kept them from hitting on him. It kept willful socialites from pushing their daughters his way, and helped Hannibal maintain the distance between him and his cultivated company of pigs.

Hannibal swiftly guided Alana into a conversation about her latest paper and knowingly poked Mrs. DuPond's growing hatred of her cheating husband.

Another near-perfect meal.

By the time the final course dwindled on his guests' plates, Hannibal itched for something different. The rain grew heavier outside, and he only hoped Will and the twins hadn't been caught in it. Hannibal watched the bushes in the backyard thrash in the heavy winds as he plated dessert.

He had a bad feeling.

Hannibal eyed the mousse. He could abandon it. Usher his guests out under the guise of a patient emergency. There would be gossip, but nothing damning. Nothing to ruin his reputation. Being seen as a caring doctor would hardly hurt Hannibal's good name.

Hannibal made up his mind, covering the mousse with foil, when the door slammed open. Hannibal drew up short with a frown. Surely, none would try to leave while he stepped away. It would be unspeakably rude. The wind could have opened the door too wide, he supposed, but he knew he shut it firmly after the last guest arrived.

The frantic, desperate scream of, "*Papà!* " had him moving. He left the mousse on the counter.

Hannibal elbowed through the guests blocking the way into the foyer.

Florence stood in the doorway. Wet brown hair plastered to her scalp, her eyes wide and desperate. She had a lump in her arms. Dark green. One of Will's coats.

Brutus, their huge mastiff-mutt-mix, stood at her side. He didn't have his teeth bared at Hannibal's guests, but he knew it was a near thing. The big dog was fiercely protective of the children, and Hannibal tolerated his presence in the house for that reason alone. He, too, was wet. Hannibal ignored the scent of wet dog as best as he could.

"Mažoji," Hannibal said, alarmed. He pushed her wet hair out of her eyes. His thumb traced the jagged, ugly scar across her forehead. It went through her silver moon, and reminded Hannibal of his greatest mistake every time he touched it. Oddly, he found it grounding. She was strong. She'd survived. "What's happened?"

Florence's face crumpled. She leaned into his neck, sobbing.

Hannibal's heart clenched.

His little mažoji did *not* cry. He hadn't seen tears since she took a blade to the face six years prior. She was stalwart and stern and decidedly unemotional.

"She's a mini you," Will always teased.

Florence wiggled away to all but shove her burden into Hannibal's arms.

"I found him on the porch," she said wetly. Tears still falling. "I-- I waited for Dad to come back but he *didn't,* Papa. He said he would be back for lunch and--" she broke off with another sob. "He's so *cold*, Papa. I didn't know what to do."

Hannibal moved the coat aside. A glowing blanket wrapped around the bundle in his arms. Hannibal traced his index finger around the sun on the child's forehead, and amber eyes blinked up at Hannibal from beneath wispy chocolate hair. The tiny baby wailed, his skin *cold* to the touch. Hannibal slipped him out of the wet blanket and coat and tucked the baby beneath his suit jacket. The wet fabric landed on the carpet with a *slap.*

Wished babies weren't *supposed* to get cold.

He was too small. Not the size Arno had been. He looked at least two months premature. Hannibal shushed his unnamed son and kissed his daughter's head.

"Hannibal, who…?" Alana asked, watching the children with wide eyes.

Hannibal stamped down the urge to shield Florence with his body. She tensed up against him, cowering into his back. She *hated* crowds. Even the small gaggle of his guests would be too much for Hannibal's darling daughter.

He straightened and fixed a firm smile onto his face. "I apologize, but it seems we must cut this evening short."

"Is that your child?" the ever-curious Ms. Barnes asked. Her eyes lit up. She loved gossip. He'd invited her to ensure that Mrs. DuPond found out about her husband's infidelity. He pursed his lips unhappily. Now, she would be sure to inform all of the Baltimore elite of Hannibal's secret family.

Will would be furious.

Hannibal turned to Florence. "Sweetheart, please take your brother upstairs. Run a warm bath. Not hot. Place him in the water but keep his head above the surface. I'll be right up."

Florence, steeling herself with a brave sniffle, took her brother back. She held him gently. "*Si, papà,"* she murmured, her voice lilting with a soft Italian accent. She darted upstairs, her feet light on the carpet. Even upset, she abandoned her wet boots in the hallway. Hannibal loathed shoes on in his home. He made an exception for the dinner party guests, who only ever saw the parlor and the dining room. The dog followed in her shadow, remaining between Florence and the unknown adults all the while.

"Thank you all for coming," Hannibal said. He opened his front closet to hand the guests their coats. "I apologize again that our evening must come to such an abrupt end. I promise I will make it up to you all."

Several of his guests asked lightly probing questions, but the smart ones kept their goodbyes brief and pleasantries light. He noted who he would and wouldn't invite again.

At last only Alana remained. She shifted on her feet. Unsure of her place. "Do you need help?" she asked.

Hannibal pointedly ignored the hurt in her big, brown eyes. If they were truly as close as Alana assumed, she would know the name of Hannibal's spouse, and of the existence of their children.

"No, thank you," Hannibal said. He helped her into her coat. "I'm afraid we will likely leave for the hospital soon. The child is too small. Too cold. I fear something is wrong with him."

Alana squeezed his bicep. "It's no trouble, Hannibal. I would be happy to go with you."

Hannibal groaned inwardly. What would Will say in a moment like this? Probably, "*Would you fuck off? I said no*."

Instead, Hannibal shook his head again and kept his polite smile on his face. "Thank you for the offer, Alana, but I'm afraid Florence is terribly anxious around strangers. I would hate to add to her stress."

Alana tucked her hair behind her ear. "That's your daughter, right?" she asked.

Hannibal nodded. He smiled wistfully. "My spouse named her after the city where we met. She is a sweet child. Perhaps next time, I will introduce you properly." Hannibal kissed her cheek before she could say more. "Drive safely, Alana."

Reluctantly, with mumbled agreements, she left.

Hannibal took the stairs two at a time.

Unsurprisingly, Florence used the tub in the master bathroom. She knelt next to it, shivering, as she held her brother in the warm water. A wet spot gathered on the mat under her knees. She was still soaked.

Hannibal knelt by her side, gently easing the baby out of her grasp. He gurgled happily, seemingly content now that he was warm. "You've done a wonderful job," he praised when Florence sagged into his side. "The water is perfect, and he is warm now. Please, take a hot shower and change into something dry, Florence. I won't have you catching cold."

With great reluctance, Florence got to her feet and shuffled out of the room.

Hannibal removed his son from the water and gave him a perfunctory physical. Despite what he told Alana, the boy seemed in perfect health. Now warm, he was bright-eyed and happy. He giggled as Hannibal toweled him off and dressed him in baby pajamas that were too big for him. They kept baby clothes around. Just in case. Still, his size worried Hannibal.

Florence reappeared in her sweats and a thick robe just as Hannibal tucked his stethoscope away. "Is he okay?" she asked worriedly.

"Perfectly healthy," Hannibal soothed. He stroked his hand over her wet hair and guided her across the room to sit in front of the fire. She snuggled into his side on the loveseat. "Tell me what happened," he urged gently.

Brutus curled up on the rug, one ear raised their way.

She watched her brother, seemingly back to her usual self. "Dad and Arno left before sunrise," she said quietly.

"To fish?" Hannibal assumed.

Florence nodded.

"Why didn't you go with them?"

She flushed and mumbled, “I had cramps.” Hannibal ran a soothing hand down her spine. As the only girl, she was sensitive to speaking about her menstrual cycle. Hannibal, for the life of him, didn’t understand why. As a doctor, he had no qualms speaking on such subjects. “Brutus started barking while I was eating breakfast. So I went to let him out and… found him.” She motioned at the baby.

“He was still asleep?” Hannibal assumed.

Florence nodded. “I kept him in his blanket, like you said,” she continued. “I just held him and waited for dad to get back.” She sniffled. Upset again. “But Dad didn’t come back.”

“What time did he say he would return?”

“By lunch,” Florence said miserably. “But it started raining *way* before that even though Dad said it wouldn’t rain until tonight. I waited all day, Papà, I did. I know I’m not supposed to take the car unless it’s an emergency but he kept getting colder and colder and I didn’t know what to do! We lost power so I couldn’t call you and then I started getting cold too, and--” she babbled until Hannibal gently cut her off.

“You’re alright, darling. You did the right thing. I promise. I am so proud of you, mažoji,” Hannibal soothed. “My sweet, brave girl. You drove all the way here and you kept your brother safe. You have *nothing* to apologize for. Do you understand?”

Florence sagged in relief. “Yes, Papà.”

Hannibal kissed her drying curls. At least two of his brood were safe. That just left the troublesome ones. Hannibal frowned, watching the flames. Will wouldn’t leave Florence alone all day unless something happened. They may have waited somewhere, hoping for the rain to pass, or gotten stuck somehow. Unease coiled in his gut. He shouldn’t drive to Wolftrap in the heavy rain. It was a miracle unlicensed Florence made it home in one piece to begin with. Luckily, Will started teaching the twins to drive at twelve.

Just in case.

It paid off. Hannibal would buy him a gift.

Hannibal wouldn’t leave Florence alone again, but he didn’t want to take her and the tiny boy out into the storm. It would have to wait until the morning.

Will and Arno would be fine.

They *had* to be.

“Come along, sweetheart,” Hannibal said. “Why don’t we get some rest, hm? You can sleep with me until your dad returns.”

“You think dad’ll come home?” she asked softly.

“I know so,” Hannibal promised. “He would never leave us.” Hannibal wouldn't let him.

A Cold Walk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will hurt. Everywhere.

Arno, despite being teary eyed and freezing, put on the bravest face he could. He was emotional. Blue eyes full of sorrow and teeth chattering. He was a soft, empathetic boy. Just like Will. Arno started crying hours ago. He hadn't stopped.

Will locked his jaw and focused on the road. His left leg screamed and his chest ached.

It started raining hours before it was supposed to, the wind taking a sudden shift and the skies turning for the worst. He and Arno had to hike through the woods in sideways rain. It was only several miles, but slow going as Will struggled to stay on course. They had their raincoats, so Will wasn't overly worried, but then Will tripped, slid down an embankment, and broke his leg. It hurt to breathe. He knew he probably cracked a rib or two.

To make matters worse, his cellphone decided to take a dive into the river. It got swallowed immediately, vanishing below the white waves.

Arno didn't have the skills to fashion a splint, and Will couldn't manage it with shaking hands in the downpour. He vomited twice on the hike back from the pain. Arno stood by him, refusing to go ahead and leave him behind.

"Come on, kiddo," Will tried. "You're going to get hypothermia."

Arno scowled and replied, "No, dad." Arno wormed his way under Will's arm to help him walk. He wouldn't hear any of Will's protests, instead sticking to his father like glue.

It took nearly six hours to trek out of the woods, instead of the usual one and a half. By the time they got to the house, it was dinner time. Will's heart stopped when he realized the house was empty-- save for Buster, Nappy, and Cephy. The car was gone from the driveway, and Florence was nowhere in sight. Will panicked. The power was out, and the landline didn't work.

Will got Arno and the pack into the car as quickly as he could manage, and then he began the slow drive to Baltimore. His heart lurched to his throat every time he saw someone pulled off to the side. He dreaded finding Florence over the side of the road. Hazards flashing. Little face broken and bloody. He shuddered.

Never again.

That anxiety never left him, even when he pulled into the driveway behind the missing car.

She's okay , Will told himself as he slowly got out of the car. *She's here. She's home. She's fine* .

Hannibal left the porch lights on for them. It brought less comfort than it should have.

While Will didn't consider himself the same as Hannibal when it came to their children (domineering, obsessive, possessive), Will didn't want to see them hurt. He didn't like it when he didn't know where they were.

He supposed that was normal, for a parent. Even if the children were wished, they were still *his.* A paternity test would come back positive for both Hannibal and Will.

Will fumbled with the lock, cursing as he dropped the keys on to the wet porch. He tried to retrieve them, but Arno beat him to it. "I got it, Dad," he said. He unlocked the door.

Will limped inside as Arno rushed to get the dogs into their room. Hannibal and Will converted the ground floor guest room into a room for the dogs when they moved in. A discreet dog door built into the wall exited into the backyard. Hannibal let them wander the ground floor, provided the house got vacuumed twice a week.

"Han!" Will yelled up the stairs. He sagged against the wall in the hallway. He couldn't manage the stairs. Not with his leg.

Arno reappeared without the dogs at the same time Hannibal and Florence arrived at the top of the staircase.

"Dad!" she cried. Will bit back his scream of pain as she slammed into him. Hannibal was at her heels, concern etched into his features

"Stop! He's hurt!" Arno said, tugging at his sister.

Florence stepped back immediately, wide-eyed and pale.

"I'm alright, hon," Will soothed through his teeth. "I just took a little fall."

Hannibal knelt by Will's leg. "It is broken," he clipped. He stood, anger in his eyes. Not at Will, but because Will was hurt. Only Hannibal was allowed to hurt Will. He stood and cupped Will's face. Will leaned into his warm palm. "Come, darling. Let me tend to you." He turned to Arno. "Are you hurt, mažasis?"

Arno quickly shook his head. "No, Papà."

Hannibal touched Arno's cheek with the back of his hand. "You're freezing," he said, voice dripping with disapproval. His gaze flicked to Florence. "You and your sister both, showing up wet and cold," he mused. Florence looked at her feet, and Arno flushed. "Go take a warm shower and change."

Arno, shivering and not needing to be told twice, nodded and went upstairs. Florence loitered while Hannibal helped Will up the stairs one painful step at a time. She finally went into her brother's room when Hannibal gently shooed her away.

Will nearly tripped on Brutus, who laid on the floor in the middle of their bedroom door. Will frowned. Hannibal barely tolerated his dogs, most of them banished to their own room and the backyard while in the Baltimore house. Hannibal wouldn't let Brutus just *hang out* in their bedroom. Brutus alone got free-reign of the house, sure, but that was only because he stuck to the twins like glue. The big dog wouldn't abandon them. Not while they were upset.

"Is Florence okay?" Will asked as he stepped around Brutus.

"Shaken, but fine," Hannibal soothed. "She got here without issue around seven."

Will froze. He would have fallen if Hannibal didn't have such a firm grip on his waist and shoulder. "Your dinner party started at six," Will said, not bothering to smother the accusation in his tone.

"It did," Hannibal agreed. His face was a smooth mask. Unreadable. "She showed up just before dessert."

Will closed his eyes, swaying on his feet. "They saw her," he whispered. Hannibal didn't have to say anything. Will knew. His husband put up his defenses around Will only when he knew that his words would make Will upset. Surprisingly considerate, given his hobbies.

Hannibal gently rubbed a circle on Will's hip with his thumb. "Yes," he agreed regretfully.

"Did anyone figure out that she's ours?" he asked weakly.

"She called for me as she opened the door," Hannibal murmured. "Rather unavoidable. Though she met Alana, I do not think anyone has connected her to you, at least."

Will nodded numbly. "I need to sit down," he mumbled.

Hannibal guided Will to sit on the edge of the bed. He knelt and began to take off Will's muddy boots. Reverently. "We knew this day would come eventually," he murmured. "It is not possible to live in one place for so long and not be discovered."

Will swallowed. He nodded.

At Will's silence, Hannibal met his gaze. "Do not worry, my love. I will not let anything happen to the children."

The *again* hung in the air between them like an old carcass. Smelly and neglected. Slowly rotting away beneath their floorboards.

"I know," Will murmured.

Hannibal kissed Will's good knee. His smile was soft. The one that he reserved for Will and the twins. "She had reason to rush here." He nodded at the bed. "Look behind you, darling."

Will frowned. He turned, not comprehending when he spotted the faintly glowing orange blanket amongst their satin sheets. "Why did you get out Arno's blanket?" he asked.

“That is not Arno’s,” Hannibal said. He reached over Will to the other side of the bed, and picked up the bundle.

Will froze as Hannibal gently placed the bundle in his arms. He finally spotted the thin wisps of brown hair. “Is he…?” Will whispered. He stared down at the *tiny* child. Even asleep, Will saw Hannibal’s sharp features in his little nose and cheeks.

Hannibal smiled wider. Proud. “Yes. Florence found him on the stoop shortly after you left. She brought him here when you didn’t return.”

Will slumped forward. He stared at the tiny baby. “He’s so small,” Will whispered.

“He was cold,” Hannibal said, stiffly. He pulled his medical kit out of somewhere and knelt next to the bed.

“Wish babies aren’t supposed to be cold.”

“Nor are they supposed to be premature,” Hannibal agreed. “He appears to be healthy, aside from his size. I will schedule an appointment for him in the morning.” He pursed his lips, cutting Will’s wet jeans from his skin. “For you as well,” he added drily.

Will hissed as the fabric brushed against his leg. “We should take him to the doctor now,” he murmured.

Hannibal hummed in consideration. “I examined him quite thoroughly, though blood tests would not be remiss.”

Will chuckled, despite the ache in his chest. “Florence will be upset. Another boy. She’s still the only girl.”

“Quite,” Hannibal agreed, his lips quirking in amusement. “I suspect the next several dogs you keep will be the girls.”

They shared a quiet laugh.

Will said, “We should name him.”

Hannibal looked up from Will’s injured leg and nodded. “I was thinking of Alexander,” he murmured. “It’s a strong name.”

“Too many A’s,” Will disagreed. “He deserves his own letter.”

“Only two is not too many,” Hannibal said.

“It is. Florence might feel left out if both of her brothers' names start with A.”

Hannibal chuckled. “Do you have an idea then, my dear?”

Will considered it. He had a few names he bounced around over the years. He, unlike Hannibal, preferred simple names. (Normal names.) “Max,” Will offered. “It’s strong, too.”

"Max," Hannibal repeated. He rolled the name over his tongue, seemingly deep in thought. When he next looked up at Will, mischief flashed in his amber eyes. Hannibal leaned up onto his elbow to touch their son's face. "Maximus," he agreed.

Will snorted. "It could be *just* Max."

Hannibal smirked. "Maxwell," he countered.

"Hannibal," Will protested. He couldn't hide his amusement.

"Mmm, Maximilian it is. It fits," Hannibal decided.

"You're lucky I love you," Will said fondly.

Hannibal leaned up to kiss him. "The luckiest man in the entire world. My darling, horrible boy. I love you more than air." He sighed, pressing his forehead into Will's. "I was worried, Will. You frightened me today."

Will kissed him again. "I'm sorry, Han."

"I know," Hannibal agreed. He kissed the bridge of Will's nose. The high of his cheek. The scrape on Will's chin. "But you are safe. We are all safe. That is all that matters."

They both stared at their little son for a long time. He was cute. Even cuter, when he opened his eyes and giggled up at Will. His babble was *so* much like Florence's that Will teared up. He was perfect.

"Our little Max," Will cooed.

Hannibal put his hand on Max's belly. A warm (possessive) gesture. "I will admit, I have not put much thought into how we will go about raising him while maintaining our secrecy."

Will chewed nervously on his lower lip. They lucked out with the twins, who were ten when they came to the States. Hannibal had more than enough medical experience to keep them healthy. Except for their yearly vaccinations, Hannibal saw to all of their medical care himself. Hannibal hated to admit it, and would never say it aloud, but he did *not* have the medical training for babies. He was a practical man, a believer in referring to expertise. He grudgingly passed the twins' care to a pediatric specialist fifteen years ago. They would have to do the same now. Hannibal knew too many doctors. Someone would link Max to him. Will would have to go to some appointments, and that meant they would tie Will to Max and Hannibal to Will.

"We can't parent him from the shadows," Hannibal said quietly.

Will nodded. With the twins, while Will and Hannibal dutifully attended all events and parent-teacher conferences and relevant parental meetings, they kept their distance. They did not rub elbows with other parents. As much as Will knew Hannibal wanted to, his husband didn't join the PTA or any other school organizations. Few parents knew them by face (even less by name), especially since the twins didn't keep friends.

Florence was too anxious, and Arno too reluctant to leave his sister behind. The twins stuck close, burying themselves in family and hobbies.

"Maybe it's time," Will said quietly. He rubbed his thumb over Max's cheek. Soft. Chubby. Innocent. Too innocent for Hannibal's hobbies and Will's profession.

Hannibal considered Will carefully. In his *fucking psychiatrist voice* , he said, "Zeus could not conceal his children forever, even knowing Hera's wrath. Try as he might to hide them, many were forced to endure her rage; Heracles was driven to madness by Hera, and slew his old wife and son. Lamia was forced to eat her own children after Hera discovered their existence. Tell me, Will, are you determined to love our children openly, even knowing that we may face scorn?"

Will reached over and flicked his nose.

Hannibal huffed.

"Are you Zeus in this hypothetical or am I?" Will asked.

Happy to play, Hannibal's eyes crinkled with his smile. "I suspect you are Hera, Will. Your willingness to resort to the darkest extreme to protect our children is reminiscent of the way she coveted her marriage and her own children."

"I'm not like Hera. I'm not petty enough to punish children, and I'm not going to start a war because someone is prettier than me, Hannibal."

"I would," Hannibal said. Adoration colored his amber eyes. "You are beautiful. My Ganymede."

Will snorted. "Worthy of being carried away?"

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. "I would have you all to myself."

"You're more like Hera than me, Hannibal. You're the one who would punish anyone who intruded on our marriage," Will teased.

Hannibal just hummed. Easily agreeing. "I would do far worse than drive someone to madness, or curse them into the form of a beast."

"Eat them?" Will mused.

Hannibal kissed Will's cheek. "Yes," he said. A dark, private smile spread over his lips. "And you would watch. Relish in the darkest corners of my mind as though they were your own. A reflection of my ire, a mirror of my wrath. My darling boy."

Will closed his eyes, and took a moment to enjoy the emotions between them. That heady, heavy knowledge that he *saw* and Hannibal *knew.* He would never find this sort of sick contentment with anyone else. The open darkness. Shadows, plainly on display. It was addicting.

“I love you,” Will murmured.

“And I, you,” Hannibal echoed.

After a time, Hannibal sighed reluctantly, and rose to his feet. “And, as much as I hate to leave after the day we have had, it would be best if we took you to the emergency room. The break in your leg is not one I can mend without an x-ray.”

Will made a face. “I hate hospitals,” he muttered.

Hannibal ruffled Will’s hair. “I know, mylimasis. I will not leave you there.”

With great reluctance, Will muttered, “I guess we need to take Max, anyway.” He tickled the baby’s stomach, and the little guy squirmed happily. “Let’s get this over with.”

Hannibal chuckled. “Fret not, Will. I will be by your side all the while.”

Chapter End Notes

I love commmmennnntssss. <3 :D

Hospital, and Love

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal "*I will be by your side all the while"* Lecter was a dirty fucking liar because he vanished with Max five minutes after they were checked into the hospital. Will knew that Max's health should be their priority, but it still cut that he couldn't go with. He glowered at the wall behind the nurse as she finished fitting his cast to his leg.

The twins sat in the corner in cheap plastic chairs. Florence, like Hannibal, dressed like she was going to church before they left. A cute dress with thick stockings and Mary Janes. By contrast, Arno still had his pj's on, just with a sweatshirt over the top.

The nurse, Angelica, stood with a smile. "You're all set!" she declared. She pulled off her nylon gloves with a satisfactory snap.

Florence perked. "May we go to Papa and Max now?" she asked Will.

Will grunted. "Yeah, hon. Of course."

The nurse smiled. " *So* polite. I swear, all the wished children are. My niece is moon-blessed, and she is just the sweetest little darling I have ever met. Meanwhile, *my* daughter keeps putting worms in her brother's hair." She shook her head.

Will chuckled. "My son did the same," he said. Arno flushed and looked at the floor. The nurse clearly wanted to hear more about the children, but Will didn't like small-talk. Never had. Instead, he said, "We had another one appear a few hours ago. My husband, Hannibal Lecter, checked him in when we arrived. Do you think you could find them for us?"

"Of course!" the nurse said. She winked. "I'll be right back!"

After the door closed behind her, Florence remarked, "She is too cheerful."

"You're just lame," Anro told his sister.

She reached over and smacked his arm.

He smacked her back.

"Don't start, you two," Will said. He stood carefully. He felt a little better after the pain meds they gave him. Luckily, the break in the leg was clean, and didn't need surgery. His ribs, while bruised, weren't broken. He had a mild concussion, but nothing that would do lasting damage. He got lucky.

"Should you be walking?" Arno asked. He stood and hovered around Will with his arms out, like Will was a toddler ready to topple over at any second.

"I'm fine, kiddo," Will assured him.

Arno didn't look convinced.

Florence stood, too. She crossed her arms and critically examined the cast. "Why couldn't Papa do it for you?" she asked.

"Because Papa doesn't have an x-ray machine," Will replied.

Florence pursed her lips, and said, "Well. We should get one."

"We can't just *buy* an x-ray machine, hon."

"I bet we could afford it," Florence muttered.

Will chuckled. "Not my point, Flo."

"When do we get to see Max?" Arno asked. He rocked back on his heels, bouncing in place.

"As soon as the nurse gets back."

The twins nodded to themselves, seemingly satisfied. Florence asked, "Are we going to have to share a room again?"

Will frowned at her. "Of course not. Why would we make you share a room?" They were teenagers. Well beyond the age where opposite-sex siblings should be cohabitating if they didn't have to.

"There's only three bedrooms upstairs," Florence explained. "Are you going to put Max in Arno's room?"

Arno glumly said, "I don't want to share with a *baby* . He's going to cry all the time."

Will shrugged. "For now, he'll sleep with me and Papa." They had a point, though. There were two more unused bedrooms downstairs, but Will didn't want any of the children a floor away. Hannibal's home office was on the second floor, and would likely be sacrificed in the name of keeping the children close. Hannibal built bookshelves into the walls, and would be reluctant to redecorate (he was always so set in his ways), but they would make do. "We'll figure it out," he told them, "but you don't need to worry. Nobody has to share rooms."

"You made us share rooms when we were little," Arno said.

Will smiled. "No. You *had* your own room, Arno. You just refused to sleep in it until you were twelve."

Arno frowned. "Even in Sassari?"

"Yes," Will agreed. "Your Papa tried very hard to get you to sleep in your own room. He gave up when you turned eight and threw all your bedding out of the window in protest."

Arno pouted. He mumbled something to himself. Will just reached out and patted his head. Their son was short, shorter than Will by two inches. He leaned against Will and sighed. Florence joined them, holding Will's hand and leaning against her brother.

The nurse reappeared, cooing at them. "Aw. You cuties! I found your hubby. Follow me, and I'll take you to the NICU."

A spark of fear raced down Will's spine. "The NICU?" He demanded, "What happened? Is Max okay?"

Angelica smiled. "From what I heard, he's just fine, Mr. Graham. They hooked him up to an EKG and ran some tests, but when I poked my head in, he was being held by your husband." She led the way without wasting his time, likely picking up on Will's anxiety.

The NICU was several small rooms. One was the room full of babies in glass boxes, like Will saw on TV. Hannibal and Max weren't there, Will realized. He searched the room from corner to corner, but there was no Hannibal. Just two masked nurses and a woman in a wheelchair who held what was likely her child. A few other people loitered around the main area. Some holding bigger babies, others watching the glass-box infants.

Will kept following Angelica, but startled when someone grabbed his arm.

"Graham?" a familiar voice asked.

It took him a second. "Beverly," he replied.

He almost didn't recognize her in pajamas and a hoodie. Her hair was thrown up in a bun. A far cry from her usual lab coat and professional appearance.

Sweat gathered on the nape of his neck. Fuck. He had Arno still at his side and Florence in his shadow. She stepped closer, using Will as a body shield.

Beverly Katz looked tired, but happy. "Hey!" she said, grinning now. "Thought that was you. Saw you from over there, but I wasn't sure." She playfully punched his arm. "The hell you doing here, Graham?"

"Uh," Will said.

She dropped her hand, suddenly guilty. "Oh, God, sorry. I should remember where we are. You're probably here with family, right?"

Will nodded.

Beverly continued, "My sister gave birth a few hours ago. Was totally unexpected, but of course Mom called everyone who lives in the area and we all rushed over." She waved a hand at the group of people by the glass. "So now the entire Katz clan is here." She finally noticed the children by Will, and her brow creased. "Hi," she said to Arno, who stared at his feet, "I'm Beverly Katz. I work with Will."

Arno glanced at her hand, to her face, back to her hand. In Italian, he said, " *I don't want to talk to her, Dad."*

Will squeezed Arno's shoulder. "Sorry," he said, wincing. "We're here for their brother."

If Arno refusing to speak to her offended her, she didn't show it. Beverly laughed. "Oh, man. Stuck with babysitting? That happens to me all the time. Since I'm the only one without kids they act like I'm free labor constantly."

Will tried to smile. It felt more like a grimace.

Angelica said, "Oh, there's your husband, Mr. Graham!"

Will whipped his head around. Beverly froze beside him. Not that he blamed her. Will didn't wear his ring on his hand. It lived on a chain around his neck that he kept tucked under his clothes.

Hannibal walked up, speaking quickly to another beaming nurse. Dressed in a paisley three-piece suit, he stood out like always. Will's heart warmed at the sight of him. Max slept in his arms, his cheeks red and teary.

Florence greeted him first. "Is he okay, Papa?" She leaned over her little brother.

Hannibal kissed the crown of her head. "He is in perfect health," he assured her. His eyes flicked to Beverly immediately, the very picture of politeness. "I apologize. Are you a friend of Will's?" he asked.

Beverly blinked, stuck out her hand and said, "Beverly Katz. We, uh, we work together."

"Hannibal Lecter," Hannibal returned. "I've heard many things about you, Ms. Katz.

Will watched Beverly look between Hannibal and Will and their three children. Her brows drew together as she came to her own conclusions. She wasn't an idiot. She knew. "Only good things, I hope," she said with less pep than usual. She focused back on Will, frowning. "I didn't know you were married," she said.

Will shrugged. "Most people don't."

"We value our privacy," Hannibal added with a pointed smile.

The other nurse cut in, "I'm glad that we caught you, Mr. Graham." She handed Will a clipboard. "Your husband said you would want to sign the birth certificate."

Beverly ooh'd. "Have you given him a name yet?"

"We decided on Max a few hours ago," he said. "We'll hyphenate the last name for him, just like we did for the twins."

Beverly seemed more at ease, now. Will saw the curiosity in her eyes. But, like usual, she was just happy to have him talking to her at all. It wasn't that Will *didn't* like her, quite the

opposite in fact, but Will couldn't make friends and keep his family a secret. He kept everyone at arm's length out of habit. If he were to make anyone a friend in the brave new world of being publicly married, Bev would be near the top of that list.

"What about a middle name?" she asked.

"Mischa," Hannibal and Will said in unison. They shared a quiet smile.

Will examined the birth certificate. Maximilian Mischa Graham-Lecter. Will snorted. "I can't believe you're going with Maximilian," he said.

Hannibal's lips quirked. "Of course. He must have a dignified name."

Florence quietly said, "It could have been Maximus. Like the horse from *Tangled.* "

Will watched as Hannibal mentally dashed Maximus from the list of all future name suggestions. Will laughed in earnest at the expression on Hannibal's face.

"I love that movie," Beverly said to their daughter.

Florence perked, shot Beverly a shy smile, and then ducked her head to hide behind her hair.

Will signed on the empty line, and then handed the clipboard back to the other nurse. She and Angelica said their goodbyes before returning to their duties.

Hannibal moved closer to Will, putting a possessive hand on his lower back and passing him the baby. "We have been ordered to watch his growth closely, but apparently Max's condition is not as rare as we thought. Assuming he is well taken care of, he should be alright."

Max blinked hazily up at Will, yawning before snuggling his little face into Will's jacket. Will smiled at him. "Thank God."

Beverly put a hand on Will's shoulder, startling him. She had a quiet smile that he couldn't quite place. "I'll leave you to it," she said. She waved at the kids and Hannibal, taking a polite step back. "Good to meet you guys. Have a good night."

"You as well," Hannibal returned. He kissed the shell of Will's ear. "Shall we head home, darling?"

Will nodded. They were quiet until they got back to the car. Once inside, Will admitted, "That went better than I thought it would."

"Beverly?" Hannibal supposed.

"Yeah," Will agreed. "She isn't a gossip, either, so I think she'll keep it to herself."

"She seems polite."

“She is,” Will agreed. “You would probably like her.”

Hannibal smiled. “She’s done nothing to make me think otherwise so far,” he said. Hannibal glanced at the children in the backseat. Florence was the only one still awake, but Will saw the way her eyes fought to stay open. “We should discuss what we will say going forward.”

Will reached over and took Hannibal’s hand.

Hannibal looked at him curiously.

“I think we have to go all in at this point,” Will said. “Beverly knows, and so does Alana. It’s only a matter of time before all of your acquaintances have heard and my coworkers catch wind of it.” He looked at their joined hands. “We’ll take precautions. Make sure that none of my work for Jack affects the kids. Keep your patients away as well.”

“I will refer the violent ones,” Hannibal said.

“Are you sure? I know they’re your main source of entertainment.”

Hannibal shrugged. Somehow, he made the gesture seem elegant. “The amusement isn't worth the risk,” he said firmly.

Will squeezed Hannibal's hand in thanks. “Maybe I should quit. The consulting work, I mean.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal agreed. “Though it does put us in a unique position of power with Jack Crawford. We may yet need your influence over the Ripper case.”

“Maybe,” Will mumbled.

“We have time to decide,” Hannibal soothed. “Your work with the FBI has yet to follow you home in the flesh. So long as it doesn’t happen, I do not believe we have reason to worry.”

They pulled up to the house, and went about rousing the twins and carrying the baby inside. The twins both went into Florence’s room to sleep, and Hannibal and Will went into the master bedroom. Hannibal fetched the spare crib from the storage room in the basement, and he set it up for Max.

They watched him sleep for a bit, simply leaning into one another and enjoying the familial closeness. No pressure. No expectations. Just Will and Hannibal and their newest little family member.

Eventually, the slow hands on Will’s hips wandered lower and slid down the front of his boxers. Will breathed out on a gasp, pleasure warming his stomach as Hannibal’s calloused hand worked his shaft.

“I’d like to love you,” he murmured into Will’s ear.

Will smiled, turning to kiss him. “You don’t have to ask,” Will replied.

They fell into bed, their pajamas hastily discarded onto the floor. Will stretched out in the middle of the mattress, his skin warm and slick against the smooth sheets. He always sweated too much, and sex was no exception.

Hannibal licked the inside of his knees, smiling down at him as he ran his fingers from Will’s shoulders to his hipbones. He traced the scars he left on the way there. The deep bites on Will’s shoulders, arms, and thighs. The thick scar that smiled across his belly. Each one was traced and kissed. Loved.

Sex with Hannibal always made Will feel like he was getting eaten alive. Even when they were slow and quiet, Hannibal had a way of making sure that every inch of Will got special attention. He rolled one of Will’s nipples and bit the other; then he licked Will’s sternum and belly. Nipped the edge of his bellybutton.

Will kept his hands above his head, panting into his shoulder and watching through slitted eyes as Hannibal made a meal of him.

Will’s dick was hard against his belly, pre-cum pooling beneath the tip. He wanted to reach for it, to take himself in hand and rub himself to completion, but he couldn’t. If Will touched himself, Hannibal would hurt him, and Will wanted it gentle. For now.

Luckily, Hannibal took mercy on him before too long. He retrieved their glass vial of lube from the side table and warmed some between his fingers. He made it himself. It smelled like warm honey.

“You’re beautiful like this,” Hannibal murmured.

Will spread his legs further apart. “I bet I’d be even prettier if you’d just fuck me already,” he said.

A sharp sting and a loud slap filled the room. Will moaned and bucked his hips. Hannibal rubbed a rough circle over the place he hit-- Will’s inner thigh. “Language,” he said.

Will looked at Hannibal from under his lashes. “Please?” he asked.

Hannibal groaned. He slid a finger into Will with little warning, bending over him to kiss and suck at his neck while he prepped him. Hannibal found Will’s prostate with brutal efficiency. Will bit on the pillowcase to stop himself from keening. The twins were likely dead to the world, but being parents meant being quiet.

One finger quickly became two and then three and then Hannibal slicked himself up and pushed slowly inside.

Their foreheads pressed together. They breathed the same air. Will whined softly, overwhelmed by the initial intrusion. Hannibal nipped his lips softly. Will felt like a bow; tightly strung and ready to snap. He urged Hannibal forward by putting a hand on his ass and pushing.

Hannibal put his face in Will’s neck and slowly began to thrust.

Will arched his back to take him deeper.

Hannibal reached up to hold Will’s hands. “I love you,” he murmured.

Holding his gaze, Will said, “I love you more.”

Savagely, as though to contradict him, Hannibal surged forward and bit deep into the flesh of Will’s shoulder. Will came, burying his head into Hannibal’s neck as the pain shot down his shoulder to the tips of his fingers. Warm blood pooled under him, making the sheets sticky. Will bit his lips, breaking skin, to stop from screaming and waking up the whole house.

Hannibal kept going, using Will’s limp body as he saw fit. Blood dripped down his chin and splattered against Will’s chest. It ran down the sides of his ribs. Hannibal's head bowed as he came with a near-silent moan. Will drank in his husband's pleasure, another echo of an orgasm racing down his spine.

Hannibal settled on top of Will, the cum and blood between them already drying their skin together. “We should shower,” Will murmured.

Kissing under Will’s newest bite, Hannibal said, “Not yet. Let me hold you for a while, mylimasis.”

Will breathed in the scent of them. His vision already going hazy. He nodded. Will had no reason to argue.

Chapter End Notes

This one is a short one, so I'll be posting the next chapter today as well!
Thank you so much for all the comments on the last chapter. I swear, the more chapters I get, the faster I write!!

Breakfast and a Guest

Chapter Notes

Two chapters today! Don't miss chapter four~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Arno enjoyed mornings. Sometimes, he felt like Papa favored Florence over him. They had more in common, and he personally tutored her in more hobbies. Despite that, Arno had his mornings with his Papa, and he loved them very much.

He woke before his sister, as always. Florence's curls were a wild, sweaty mess around her head. He slid out of her bed and padded into the bathroom. He changed out of his sleep shirt into a sweater, and then went downstairs.

The tell-tale sizzle of breakfast and the smell of coffee filled the kitchen. "Good morning, mažasis," Papa said. He smiled over his shoulder at Arno.

Arno said, "Morning, Papa." He slid up beside his father to examine the food. The beginnings of a protein scramble. "What's for breakfast?"

Papa went through the recipe in flowing French. His warm voice calmed Arno. For the first time since his long, cold walk with Dad, Arno felt *safe.* They were going to have a perfect, normal morning. Arno would make sure of it.

After Papa kissed his head, Arno went to the fridge to pour himself some juice. Papa wouldn't let either of the twins drink coffee, he claimed they were too young, so Arno grudgingly drank other things when Papa was in the kitchen. Sometimes, after Papa left for work, Dad let the twins sneak a cup.

Arno sat at the counter and watched his father's back as he cooked.

"How are you feeling, mažasis?" he asked after several minutes.

Arno looked into his orange juice. "I'm okay," he said. He rolled the glass over the surface of the counter, liking the little noise it made. He frowned. Papa was always most honest than Dad. Dad liked to pretend that they were normal, that they hadn't seen or heard the things they did. Papa didn't do that. He was always honest with them. Florence made him promise. "Is Max going to change things?"

Papa turned so he could watch Arno while he cooked. "A new child will always change the dynamic," Papa said evenly. "But it does not mean that we will love either of you less. For a time, as an infant, he will require more attention and care. However, your dad and I will still make sure to spend time with you and your sister. I imagine you and Dad will still go fishing,

and Florence and I will still practice the harpsichord in the evening. You and I will still have our quiet mornings, and Will will teach Florence how to shoot."

Arno nodded. That made sense. "Who was that woman? At the hospital?"

"Ms. Katz is a co-worker of your dad's. She is kind. You needn't worry, my dear. She is not going to harm us," Papa said.

"Florence said she saw a bunch of people last night. And that they saw her," Arno said quietly.

Papa plated Arno's breakfast and set it in front of him. He moved a lock of blond hair out of Arno's face. "They did," Papa agreed softly. "There are going to be some changes in our lives, from more than just Max. Many of my personal and professional acquaintances are now aware that I have children. We will likely go on more family outings. To appear normal."

Arno wrinkled his nose. "I don't want to go to the opera, Papa."

Papa laughed, his voice warm and reassuring. "You and Dad can lament that together," he teased. "I imagine you'll have more opportunities to make friends. I plan on getting more involved with your schooling, so if you'd like to hang out with other children your--"

"No," Arno interrupted.

Papa leveled him with a look.

"I'm sorry for interrupting," Arno mumbled. "But I don't need friends. I have Florence."

Papa seemed sad. He always seemed sad when the twins said they didn't want friends. Dad made fun of him sometimes, because Papa didn't have any real friends, either. "You do not have to be held down by your sister's fear," Papa said gently. "You are allowed to spread your wings and see the world, even if she is scared of it."

Arno drank his juice so he didn't have to reply.

Papa didn't *get* it. Florence was Florence. His *twin* . When Florence was upset, Arno felt it in his belly. He hated seeing her hurt or upset, and he knew she felt the same way. Arno read papers by other wished twins. Their connection was almost supernatural-- an awareness with a sense he couldn't name. Arno couldn't abandon his sister to make friends any more than he could bite himself on the back.

"All I ask is that you think about it," Papa soothed. "If you would like to invite someone over, or go to someone's house, all you need do is ask."

"I know, Papa," Arno said.

Papa smiled. He turned back to the fridge and started working on Dad and Florence's breakfast. He opened a tupperware container and frowned. "Ah, mažasis, will you get some bacon from the freezer in the basement? I have less than I thought."

“Yes, Papa,” Arno said dutifully. He went into the pantry and knelt on the floor to find the secret little seam that went into the secret basement.

Dad called it *Papa’s murder cave.*

Arno liked it. It was clean and cool, even in the summer. Sometimes Florence and Arno got in trouble for sneaking down there just to sit in the hot months. Papa always looked happiest in the basement, and Florence never stopped smiling. Dad watched, usually, but sometimes he adjusted the way Arno or Florence held their tools.

Hopping down the stairs, Arno flicked on the light and shimmied by the plastic sheets. There was a pig in one of Papa’s cages. Naked and angry. He banged on the glass wall with the hand he had left. Obviously crying and begging, though Arno couldn’t hear his words.

Arno waved at the piggy and got a packet of “bacon” out of the big fridge.

He went straight upstairs, resisting the urge to pet the skull on the shelf that lined the room. It had light grooves from where he had over the years. Arno waved at the skull, too, as he passed it.

Papa thanked him for the meat in soft Lithuanian before focusing on breakfast. Arno sat at the counter to finish his own meal, happy to enjoy the quiet morning with Papa.

Their quiet morning got interrupted by the doorbell.

Papa looked at the clock and frowned. Ten AM on a Saturday. “Will you fetch the door for me, mažasis? The sauce is at a delicate stage.”

“Yes, Papa,” Arno agreed. He hopped off his stool and padded to the front door. He peeked through the hole in the large oak door and frowned.

He didn’t recognize the woman on the porch. She had brown hair and a nervous look about her. Arno studied her pencil-skirt and the bag on her elbow. He *knew* that she wanted to apologize (probably to Papa, because nobody looked for Dad here) but he couldn’t tell why.

Arno opened the door and peered at her. They were close to the same height, Arno just an inch or two shorter.

The woman’s eyes went wide with surprise. “Oh!” she said. “Hello there. Are you Hannibal’s son?” she ventured to guess.

Not happy about that fact.

Not angry with Arno, but angry with Papa.

Jealous of someone.

Dad, maybe?

No, she didn't *know* about Arno, so she didn't know Dad. Jealous of the idea of them, then. Jealous that Hannibal had a family and she did not.

"Yes," Arno said softly.

She smiled a little softer. Tried to make herself less threatening. "Is Hannibal home?" she asked gently. "I just came by to drop something off."

Arno considered it.

Things will change, Papa had said.

Arno nodded. "Papa is in the kitchen," he said. He opened the door for the woman.

She held out a gloved hand to Arno. "I'm Alana, by the way. Alana Bloom."

Arno looked at her hand. He reluctantly shook it. Papa spoke fondly of her, the psychiatrist he mentored years ago, and he would hate it if Arno were rude. "I'm Arno."

Papa called, "Who is it, mažasis?"

Arno led the way to the kitchen, but Alana was sure of her steps. She'd been here before, likely when the twins were in Wolftrap with Dad.

"Good morning, Hannibal," she greeted as they crossed the threshold. "I'm sorry for dropping in unannounced, but I wanted to make sure you were doing okay."

Papa smiled, but it was a tight smile. His fake smile. The one that said, *I'm angry, and I think I will hurt you, but I'm not going to do it now.* "Alana," he greeted. "What a pleasant surprise."

Alana sheepishly put her bag down on a stool. Arno hovered in the doorway, not sure what to do. She smiled at Arno. "I brought a book for your daughter, but I didn't know you had a son, too." She took a book out of her bag and slid it across the counter.

"That was kind of you," Papa said, not meaning a word. He looked at the book. "Oh, Flannery O'Connor. I'm sure Florence will enjoy it."

Florence read *exclusively* High Fantasy, so judging from the cover, Arno doubted that very much.

Papa looked at Arno, violence in his eyes. He and Florence got the same look sometimes. Like they were sharks. All dark-eyed and sharp cheeks. "Why don't you go wake up your sister?" Papa suggested.

Arno went. It wasn't a suggestion, really. An order. But he loved Papa, so it was okay.

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Hannibal turned his back to Alana and focused on breakfast. Will would be hungry after the sex they had the night before, and Florence always woke with a voracious appetite. He heard Alana sit on one of the stools. Her light daisy perfume itched at his nose. He preferred the sleepy, warm smell of his family straight out of bed. His irritation at having it clouded by her scent knocked his anger up a level.

It was bad enough she showed up unannounced, but she did so after knowing he had a newborn and a family to take care of. She *knew* that he hated rudeness. Another mark against her.

"So," she began carefully, "you have three kids?"

"I do," Hannibal agreed. He flipped the thin section of the rude gas station clerk's thigh. "Florence and Arno are fifteen. Max arrived yesterday."

Hannibal felt Alana's stare bore into him. He didn't turn. Just focused on breakfast.

Alana's nails tapped against the counter. A steady acrylic drum. "Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded quietly. "I know you're a private man, Hannibal. But we're *friends* , aren't we?"

"Yes," Hannibal said. "We are friends, but that does not mean we have to discuss my family." He shot her a look, letting her see his disappointment. Predictively, she ducked her head in shame. "I do not speak with *anyone* about my children."

"They seem like good kids," Alana said. "I just think it's weird. I've never seen a picture of them. We've known each other for almost a decade, Hannibal. This is more than just not talking about them. I've been here dozens of times and I've never seen a trace of them. Tell me the truth: why haven't they come up?"

Hannibal turned to frown at her. He pushed the meat off the eye of the stove. He kept his face neutral, and his voice even, as he said, "Six years ago one of my patients followed me home. He broke into our house, stabbed my husband, choked my son, and slashed Florence across the face."

Alana put her hands over her mouth. "Hannibal, oh my *God* ! That's terrible!"

Pursing his lips, Hannibal continued, "My husband and I agreed it would be best if we kept them a secret after we moved to the States. I specialize in working with violent people, and my husband is in law enforcement. After what happened in Italy, we decided that it would be safest if our private lives stayed that way."

"I had no idea," Alana said softly. She closed the distance between them and put her hand on Hannibal's arm. "I'm so sorry, Hannibal."

Hannibal looked at her hand. Good, lean meat. She would make an excellent *porc aux pruneaux* . Thin slices with shallots and lemon juice. He would have to add it to his mental

menu. Mushrooms were a favorite of Florence's. Alana providing her meat was really the least she could do after upsetting his daughter.

Hannibal put his hand on hers and squeezed. "I appreciate your concern, Alana. Truly. My husband and I decided a long time ago to keep the professional and private aspects of our lives firmly compartmentalized." He feigned sadness. "I considered introducing you to the children many times since we met, but I was unsure how they would take it. Florence does not like strangers, and Arno does not like things that his sister is frightened by. I suppose I simply don't know how to let anyone into our lives anymore."

Alana hugged him. Hannibal's mood soured further. Now he couldn't smell anything but her daisies.

"I'm sorry I tried to push," she said sheepishly, pulling away. "I thought-- with the new baby and all-- that you could use some help." Her cheeks flushed pink. "I, uh, I didn't know you were married," she admitted. "I thought you were going at it alone."

Hannibal blinked. "I wear my ring," he pointed out.

"Yeah, but you also act like your spouse is dead, Hannibal. Don't even try to deny it. You get weepy when someone asks about them!"

Hannibal raised a shoulder. "It is easier. They don't ask where he is if they think he's dead."

Alana glanced around. "Does he live here, too?" she asked.

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. "He travels for work on occasion, but we spend most nights here. We have another house in Virginia, and a third in New Orleans. We take the children out of the city most weekends."

"I had no idea," Alana admitted. She smiled. Just a little. Hannibal wondered if her jealousy was aimed at his perfect little family or Will specifically. Hannibal knew she harbored affections for him, but that she did not act on them due to the assumption that he mourned his spouse. It would be interesting to see how she reacted to a union between her idolized mentor and the man she pitied so much. "I'll admit, I'm curious what kind of man you married."

A genuine smile spread over Hannibal's lips. Just thinking about his Will made his guts warm and his heart beat a pace faster. He thought about WIll, spread out underneath him. Flushed, sweaty. His hips moving in desperate little circles. He kept his hands above his head all night, proof that he wanted Hannibal to take him apart with gentle touches and sucks. Hannibal could imagine the taste of Will's musk on the back of his tongue. He could picture his face, screwed up with the pleasure of an orgasm. An orgasm that Hannibal granted.

"I love him," Hannibal said. "He is brilliant and sharp. I've never been able to perfectly predict him. I could sustain myself at the mere sight of him. Simply being in his presence is enough to make me feel fulfilled."

Alana sighed. Jealousy heightened. “You’ll have to introduce us,” she said.

“Soon,” Hannibal agreed. It would be fun, so he would make sure it happened. “Unfortunately, we were at the hospital with the newborn until merely four in the morning. I do not want to wake him up.”

Alana, thankfully taking his hint, said, “I’ll get out of your hair, then. Again-- I’m sorry that I dropped in like this.” She went back to her bag and pulled out a few items. Hannibal shadowed her, curious to see what she thought appropriate. Two bibs and two little onesies. “Here, these are for you.”

Hannibal smiled. “I don’t think they’ll fit.”

She rolled her eyes and smacked his arm playfully. “For the baby, obviously. I wasn't sure how much you had prepared for him. I thought these might help.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal said honestly, examining the clothes. “We don’t have anything in his size, as he’s so small. These will work perfectly.”

Alana beamed at him. Happy to have the gifts accepted, as though the acceptance of her gifts meant that *she* , in turn, was accepted. Hannibal walked her to the door. She apologized again, and he thanked her for the clothes.

He closed the door behind her, only to turn and catch four curious pairs of eyes at the top of the stairs.

Florence bounded down the stairs to Hannibal’s side. She hugged him tight. She asked, “Can we kill that woman, Papa?”

Hannibal smiled, kissed her head, and said, “We will, eventually.”

“Promise?” Florence asked.

Will joined them. He ruffled her hair and said, “Papa always keeps his promises, hon.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are my life blood.

School Trouble

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the support so far! This story is getting much more attention than I assumed it would, and that makes me so happy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will spoke dispassionately about the murder of Thesera Marlow to his rapt audience of students. He saw Jack Crawford loitering in his peripherals, and pointedly ignored him. The man could wait until Will finished his lecture to bully Will into a new case.

Will consulted on rare occasions, usually getting dragged off the shelf when Hannibal displayed his art or another ambitious killer started making waves. He made it clear that he wouldn't be at Jack's beck and call. He was a teacher, first and foremost.

Besides, if he joined Jack's team, he would miss out on too much time with the kids.

"...Tell me your design," Will finished, clicking on the overhead lights. "Papers are due Friday." He didn't even get behind his desk before Jack was upon him.

"Graham," Jack said in greeting.

"Jack."

The bigger man looked at the picture of dead Mrs. Marlow. "I caught the tail-end of your lecture. You do good work."

Will took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes before replacing them. "What do you want, Jack?"

Jack said, "I'd like to borrow your imagination." Like he ever wanted Will for anything else.

Will didn't have to feign the exhaustion he felt as he hobbled behind Jack to the man's office on the other side of the building. Max slept through the night the first few days, but last night and the night before he cried for hours. He was beyond fussy-- demanding to be held at all times. If they tried to lay down while holding him, he pitched a fit. Hannibal ended up sleeping in the high-backed chair by the fire with Max on his stomach.

Absently, Will thumbed his wedding ring through his shirt and listened to Jack Crawford rant on about the now eight missing girls.

“I need you with us on this, Graham. We’re interviewing the Nikols’ in the morning. I want you there with us,” he said.

Will looked at the board of girls. All very Mall of America. So similar they could all be sisters. He squinted at the pictures. Florence didn’t fit the profile. Her hair too curly, just a few years too young for this particular monster. Will’s heart ached for the families. He couldn’t imagine one of his children simply not returning home. But...

“I can’t,” Will said, still staring at the board of smiling missing (dead, he knew they were dead) girls.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. He all but glowered at Will. “There are lives at stake. Young lives. This predator is getting faster. Bolder. The abductions are happening more often.”

Will shook his head. “I can’t go with you, Jack,” he reiterated, looking Jack’s way without making eye contact. “I’m happy to consult from here, but I can’t go on any trips.”

A warm hand settled on his shoulder. “I need you on this, Graham. You’re the best of the best.”

Will grimaced. “You have Bloom at Georgetown, and Heimlich at Harvard. You don’t *need* me. I said I would help, but I’m not going with this time."

Jack scowled. “Take tonight to think about it,” he said instead of agreeing with Will’s rejection. “The flight isn’t until nine in the morning. If you change your mind, let me know.”

Will turned and left. As he went, Jack called, “Think about all the good you’ll do! All the lives you could save! Just think about it, Will!”

Halfheartedly waving over his shoulder, Will got into his car to begin the nearly hour and a half drive home. He only taught classes three days a week because of the lengthy commute.

He and Hannibal split the childcare. Will taught on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Hannibal saw patients on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. The twins went to piano lessons on Mondays after school. They would have to find long-term childcare for Max on Mondays soon, but Hannibal had taken them off since their newest son arrived. Another thing they had to figure out.

No nanny would ever be up to Hannibal’s standards, and they very much did not want a stranger poking around their home. Will supposed a solution would appear sooner or later. Once Max wasn’t an infant, they could leave him at home with the twins.

The smell of delicious dinner and happy dog paws on the wood greeted him. Will squatted to let the pack lick his face. Nappy (Napoleon), Cephy (Encephalitis), and Buster were downright delighted to see him. Will promised himself he would take them on a long hike over the weekend. Since Max’s arrival a week prior, he hadn’t been back to Wolftrap.

Arno appeared in the hallway, Brutus at his heels. “Dad!” he said in greeting. Will stood and enveloped his son in a hug. Arno clung tight. Upset. Something happened.

“Hey, kiddo,” he greeted. “How was school?”

Arno wrinkled his nose. “It was fine,” he said.

Will stared at him. He hiked up an eyebrow and waited.

Looking at his feet, Arno muttered, “I got into a fight.”

Will blinked. “I-- you *what* ?”

Of the twins, Florence was the one who lashed out violently when threatened. Hannibal worked wonders with her, helping her create safe outlets to express her rage. Arno didn’t cause those sorts of problems. Until now, anyway.

“What happened?” Will asked as he kicked off his shoes.

Arno stuffed his hands into his pockets and muttered, “They hurt Flo.” Anger flashed across his face. Will saw Hannibal in the shadows within their son’s eyes. “She went into the bathroom at lunch, and I waited outside. Heard her scream so I went in and caught Stacy and her goons attacking Flo with scissors.”

“Is Florence alright?” Will demanded. He strode toward the kitchen.

“Yeah,” Arno agreed glumly. “I had to get her off of Flo, Dad. I *had* to.”

Will walked into the kitchen to a wholly unexpected sight. Florence, ever since she was old enough to babble at Will, expressed a desire to keep her hair long. Yet, she had it cropped to her shoulders. She turned to Will with ruddy cheeks and a sour pout. Her bangs had been crudely cut from her forehead, putting her scar and moon on display. The scar went from temple to temple and dipped toward her left eye.

“Oh, honey,” Will soothed. Florence started sobbing and threw herself at Will.

Hannibal said, “Arno is suspended for three weeks for going into the ladies’ room and punching Stacy Haddock in the face. Florence is suspended for biting a chunk out of her leg.”

“We had to fight back,” Florence said miserably. “They were going to make me *bald* .”

Will reached over and pulled Arno into the hug, too. “You did a good job, Arno. Thank you for protecting your sister.”

Arno smiled and ducked his head.

Hannibal agreed, “I would have done far worse to those girls, were it my sister on the receiving end of their scissors. You did well holding yourself back, mažasis.”

“You did well, too, Flo. I’m glad you defended yourself.” Will urged both children to sit at the informal table in the corner of the kitchen. “How long has this been going on?” he asked.

The twins exchanged a loaded look. “A while,” Florence admitted. She picked at the hem of her skirt. She loved their private school uniform. The plaid skirts and white blouses made her feel pretty, she said. “They’ve never done anything besides say stuff before,” she mumbled.

“This is the first time it’s gotten physical?” Will reiterated.

Florence nodded.

“What do they usually say?”

Florence shifted from picking at her skirt to tearing at her nailbeds, so Will held her hands firmly within his own. “They call me a freak. Say I’m weird. Stupid. Ugly. Stuff like that. Stacey says we don’t *really* have parents since we’re wished kids.”

“I always tell them to shut the fuck up,” Arno said proudly. Hannibal didn’t comment on the language he used for once.

“Do you get bullied too?” Will asked him.

Arno shook his head. “No. I broke Edward’s foot last year, so they leave me alone.”

Will raised his brows. “Why is this the first time I’m hearing about you *breaking someone’s foot* ?”

The boy shrugged. Like he hadn’t just admitted to causing someone bodily harm. Will’s leg itched inside its cast. “He didn’t tattle, and the teacher thought it was an accident, so I didn’t think it mattered.”

Hannibal stepped away from his cooking to say, “You must always tell us when you hurt someone, Arno. Whether it is by accident or not. We cannot protect you if you do not tell us.”

Arno mumbled, “Sorry, Papa.”

Will rolled his eyes. They always apologized to Hannibal. He could stare at either twin for five seconds and they’re topple like a house of cards in a hurricane.

“I know you are,” Hannibal said. He wiped his hands on his apron and sat in the free chair. “I have called the school, and have a meeting with the principal first thing in the morning. Apparently Miss Haddock’s parents are pushing to have Arno and Florence expelled. I will be there to argue in their favor.”

Will reached across the table and squeezed Hannibal’s hand. “We’ll be there. I’m going too.”

The twins perked. “Even though you’ll be seen together?” Arno asked in wonder.

Will nodded. “Your papa and I have talked a lot this week. We’re going to be more open about our relationship. That means being parents, together, even if we’re in public.”

Florence looked down at the hand that still held hers. “Does that mean you’re going to wear your ring again, Dad?” she asked. She looked so damn hopeful.

Will couldn’t possibly say no. He kissed her forehead and reached back to unclasp the chain around his neck. “I think that’s a great idea.” He handed Florence the ring. “Do you want to put it on?”

Florence surprised him by shaking her head quickly. “Papa has to!” She handed the ring to Hannibal, who swiftly dropped to one knee and took Will’s left hand. “I read all about it in my books. The prince always proposes to the princess.” She looked between them. “The prince can propose to the prince, too, I guess.”

Will chuckled.

Hannibal looked silly, his apon rucked up at his knee, and Max asleep (and drooling) in the sling across his chest. Still, Will’s cheeks heated when he said, “I love you more than air. More than the sea loves the moon. I could spend every day of the rest of our lives together, and it would still never be enough.” He held up the ring between two pinched fingers. Hopeful and nervous. The twins echoed Hannibal’s nerves. They fidgeted on either side of him. Like Will might say no to his own husband. “Will you marry me?”

Will snorted. He offered his hand, though, and bent forward to kiss Hannibal.

Hannibal kissed him fiercely, like he might die without Will’s mouth against his. He slid the ring onto Will’s left ring finger. They kissed until the twins complained. Will broke off with a laugh. He loved his little family.

“I’m so glad you still love Papa,” Florence said when they parted.

Will stared at his daughter. She and Arno had the same look on their face-- clearly thinking the same thing.

“Of course I love Papa,” Will said. He frowned. “Did you think I didn’t?” he asked hesitantly.

The twins exchanged another glance. Sheepishly, Arno said, “You and Papa don’t go out anymore and you were *really* mad at him when he moved so…”

Will and Hannibal looked at one another. Hannibal looked mildly contrite, which meant he’d probably noticed the twins’ assumptions and decided not to say anything about them. Manipulative bastard.

“Of course Papa and I still love each other,” Will soothed. “He’s the love of my life. I would never just stop loving him.”

Florence beamed, delighted to hear it. Arno didn’t look convinced. He said, “But you stopped wearing your ring and you slept in the dogs’ room.”

Will winced inwardly. They didn't share a bed for almost a year. He didn't realize that Arno noticed. The kids went to bed so much earlier than Will and Hannibal, he assumed the twins didn't know about them fighting. But Arno was an early riser, and terribly observant. Will should have known better.

"Your father was rightfully mad at me for what occured in Rome. It took us a while to make up, but we never stopped loving one another," Hannibal promised gently. "I apologize if we worried you two."

Florence bounced out of her chair and hugged Will, and then bounded over to Hannibal to hug him, too. "I'm so happy!" she said. She looked between the two of them, all smiles. "Does this mean we'll start going to see the ballet again?" she asked excitedly.

Arno groaned. "Or we could go to the *movies* ."

Florence wrinkled her nose at her brother. "Live performances give life to art, Arno. Going to the movies is lame. It isn't the same."

"We can do both," Will said.

The twins' conversation devolved into an argument over what was superior: *Swan Lake* or *Sharkboy and Lavagirl* . It wasn't until they returned to the relative privacy of their bedroom upstairs that Will broached the subject again.

He sat on the edge of the bed and put his head in his hands. "I think we fucked up," he admitted.

Hannibal hummed in agreement. He stood over Max's crib, watching the child sleep. "In our ire at one another, and our fear for their safety, we forgot what is important: maintaining a *happy* environment for our children."

Will looked at Hannibal. He *did* love the man across the room from him. Forgiving him had been near impossible. Will shot him once in the shoulder on the way there, and Hannibal got halfway through gutting Will before he changed his mind. Will forgot that their children had eyes and ears of their own, and no matter how well Hannibal and Will hid it, they'd still *feel* the repercussions of their parents' fighting.

"We need to be better," Will said softly.

Hannibal looked up from the crib. He smiled back, echoing Will's expression. "We *will* be better, starting tomorrow, my love. A unified front is important in any war."

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The next morning, Hannibal dressed for battle. It would have been hysterical if Will wasn't seething about the whole ordeal himself. Hannibal wore one of his most expensive three-

piece suits. Tiny diamonds glittered in the tie. The black and crimson suit looked like something a mob boss would wear in a movie.

His eyes were darker than Will had seen in a while. Will still smarted from where Hannibal bit another gash into his shoulder the night before. This one, unlike the one from the night after the hospital, required stitches. Will dressed without complaint or mockery when Hannibal silently laid clothes out for Will on the bed.

Will wore slacks and a red sweater that complimented Hannibal's crismon. He let Hannibal put product in his hair and trim his facial hair. Anything to make Hannibal smile, even if just in his eyes. Anything to stop him from murdering the entire Haddock clan in the principal's office. The least he could do was let Florence watch.

Last night, Will stayed focused on making sure his children were okay, and trying desperately to mend the damage affecting all of them. When the sun rose, all Will could think about was the fact that his children were *hurt* . Hurt by someone's hands. He, like his darkly dressed husband, wanted *vengeance* .

The twins stayed home. Florence was upset about her hair. Only Hannibal's promise that he would get her in at her very exclusive boutique got her to stop crying the night before.

Baltimore Academy was the most expensive school in the greater Baltimore area. It boasted an extensive AP and IB programs, as well as nearly three-dozen courses offered through the local college where the high school students could earn dual credits.

Hannibal chose it for its educational merits. He also threw two large checks at the school every year, and had since they moved to the States five years ago. Will wondered how quickly the principal would succumb to Hannibal's wishes.

Their intimidating power-couple vibes were thrown off a bit by the fact that Will had a cast on his leg and a baby on his chest, but Max's forehead glowed faintly with his little sun. Wish babies always drew eyes. Most cultures thought of them as blessings; gifts from God or mother nature. Hannibal put Max in black, too. Will wondered when he had the time to buy a vantablack onesie for their infant.

They drove to the school in companionable silence, Hannibal holding Will's hand and discussing his plans for their homeschooling over the next three weeks. The twins *had* been homeschooled until their freshman year of high school a year prior, when Will and Hannibal agreed it would be best to send them to the Academy for socialization.

Their kids were weird. A little *too* weird. They knew that.

Will held Max close to his chest, rubbing his bottom soothingly, and followed Hannibal into the school. Curiously, Will's husband had a manila folder in his hand, full of papers. Will eyed it, but he didn't ask. He allowed Hannibal his drama and fun little surprises.

The hallways were empty, as school wouldn't start for another hour, and Hannibal led the way to the office. He'd only been inside once or twice, but Will knew he memorized the layout before the twins began to attend.

A couple stood talking to an elderly man that must have been the principal. A girl stood next to them, a scowl on her face and her arms crossed. The padding on her ankle looked uncomfortable. She deserved having Florence take a chunk out of her, just like she deserved the dark purple bruise on her jaw. Will studied her. No remorse. Just annoyed. Feeling vindicated by her parents' views.

Long, straight, brown hair. Wind-chafed skin. Very Mall of America.

Will's lip twitched. He needed to spend less time hurmoring Jack. He didn't like it when the FBI's unsolved cases rattled around in his head.

Her mother spotted them first. She strode up to them, spitting mad. "How *dare* you!" she all but shrieked. "Your daughter attacked mine, and you have the gall to proclaim she acted in self defense?!"

Her husband and the principal, Mr. Green, were at her heels.

"Now, Tamara," her husband began in a soothing voice. He looked at Will, then Max. Will was surprised by the tangible disdain on the man's face. He *hated* wished children. The ire quickly left him because when he saw Hannibal he visibly paled. "Hello, Dr. Lecter," he stammered.

"Hello, Jeffery," Hannibal returned neutrally. "What a surprise." His tone conveyed that it was very much *not* a surprise.

Sweat beaded on Jeffrey's brow.

Will resisted the urge to smirk. The difference in power was already clear. Hannibal got his title, and Jeffrey got addressed by his first name. Hannibal didn't consider him stimulating conversation, worthy of academic respect, nor a parody of a friend. Judging by the look on the portly man's face, he knew it, too.

Mr. Green stepped between them. "Please, Mrs. Haddock," he said, "I brought you here to have a civil conversation."

"His *monsters* attacked my baby!" Tamara proclaimed.

Hannibal's cool gaze shifted off Jeffery to Tamara. He said, "From what I understand, your daughter attacked ours in the restroom with a weapon. Her brother intervened at her cry for help."

"Let's step into my office to discuss this," Mr. Green said, urging them inside. There were four chairs in front of the desk. Will sat, and Hannibal stood behind him, his hands on the back of Will's chair.

The role of Hannibal's demure husband settled over his shoulders like a favored old blanket. Warm and familiar. Easy to wear, even after forcefully shoving it aside for half a decade. Will focused his gaze on the baby in his arms, soothing sweet nothings under his breath to the sleepy bundle of joy.

Mr. Green sat at his desk. Tamara sat, too, but Jeffery mirrored Hannibal's posture. Maybe his animal brain mimicking the predator in the room, or maybe a desperate man trying to appear he had more power than he did. Will didn't care to look to find out which for sure. Stacey sat in the chair between her mother and the wall, feigning pain.

The principal cleared his throat. "According to the witnesses, Miss Lecter attacked Miss Haddock unprovoked. When the yelling started, Miss Haddock's friends and Mr. Lecter joined the fray."

"My baby needed *stitches* ," Tamara hissed.

Stacey sniffled. "It hurts," she whined.

Hannibal's fingers twitched behind Will on the chairback. Hannibal, rather than asking for the child to be removed like another parent would, addressed his question directly to the brat in question. "If you were attacked, unprovoked, as you so claim, then why *did* you have scissors?" Hannibal asked her.

Stacey reddened a bit, and looked at her hands. She fidgeted. "Mandy wanted me to cut *her* hair a little bit."

"With classroom scissors?" Hannibal pressed. "That seems odd. They would be dull. Not ideal for something as fine as hair."

The girl shrugged defensively.

Tamara snapped, "It doesn't matter that she had the scissors. She was *attacked!* "

"It matters. Florence had hair longer than your daughter's; thick and curly like my husband's. It would take considerable time and effort to impart the damage we saw when she returned home yesterday. To cut off so much hair, she must have been restrained," Hannibal said firmly. He stared at Tamara, gaze cool. "Such an act could be considered mutilation. In Maryland, troubled, *violent* youths are rarely given a second chance before being placed in long-term care. The majority of violent minor offenders are placed in juvenile delinquent facilities."

Will assumed a thoughtful expression. He did love Hannibal's way with words.

Hannibal said, "Children as young as fourteen can be tried as adults, should their actions be grievous enough."

Tamara shot to her feet. "Are you *threatening us* ?" she demanded. She turned to her husband. "They're threatening us!"

Jeffrey just grimaced. He glanced at Hannibal and then back to his wife. No doubt weighing her anger against Hannibal-inflicted social ruin.

"Please calm down," Mr. Green said, and was ignored by all parties present.

Will raised a shoulder, but Hannibal said, “No, Mrs. Haddock. If I were threatening you, I would have brought our lawyers to this meeting. As it is, I’ve simply come with evidence that should suffice in this matter.” He handed the folder to Mr. Green, who raised an eyebrow.

The principal opened the folder and studied its contents for half a minute before his face went red. Genuine anger ticked in his jaw. Silently, he read the contents of the folder. Every flipped page dyed his face deeper crimson.

“What is it?” Jeffery asked nervously.

Mr. Green put the folder down and steepled his hands. He stared down Stacey, who shrak in her chair. “Would you like to tell your parents, or shall I, young lady?” he asked. When Stacey didn’t respond, Mr. Green said, “It would appear to be collected screenshots of conversations between Miss Lecter and Miss Haddock. They do not paint your daughter in a favorable light, I’m afraid.”

Tamara snapped, “Let me see that!” She grabbed the folder and looked at the printed pages. Will could see screenshots of text messages. Their children did not use social media at all, but they each had phones. Will didn’t know they’d given out their numbers to any of their peers. Tamara went quiet for a long minute before she closed the folder and put it on the desk. “They’re doctored! Fake! My Stacey would never!” she proclaimed.

Hannibal’s smile was thin and unkind. “From what I understand, the Academy has very strict anti-bullying policies. Is that correct, Mr. Green?”

Mr. Green inclined his head. He leveled Stacey with a hard stare. “All our students sign our anti-bullying vow on their first day of school. Baltimore Academy has a *zero tolerance* policy for both in-person and cyber bullying.”

Stacey suddenly sprang to her feet and shouted, “She started it!” The girl stamped her foot.

“Oh?” Hannibal asked lightly. “Do tell. What did she say?”

Face flushed, eyebrows still pinched in an indignant furrow, she snapped, “She said that my parents didn’t want me!” Like she flipped a switch, she started crying in great, heaving sobs.

Will studied the girl fake-crying as her parents tried to soothe her. Mr. Green seemed troubled, but still on their side. Will spoke for the first time since they arrived at the school. He shifted Max in his arms, studying the little family. He murmured, “She’s right, though.”

That drew pause from everyone in the room, even Stacey. Hannibal’s fingers brushed gently over the back of Will’s neck. Encouraging.

Will looked between them, his head tipped to the side ever so slightly. “Your eyes are the wrong color. Were he your biological father, your eyes would be blue. Two blue-eyed people *can’t* have a brown-eyed child. It’s a genetic impossibility.”

Tamara paled, and Jefferey reddened.

“You said something to her first,” Will continued in that same soft, sweet tone. “Perhaps you commented on her status as a wished-for child.” Stacey flinched. Bingo. Will studied her. “You’re jealous of her. For being wished for. You feel inadequate because you know that your parents-- *no*-- ” Will corrected himself, “ *one* of your parents doesn’t want you.”

Will’s gaze flitted between her parents. “It’s your mother, isn’t it? She doesn’t *really* pay attention to you. You’re a prop to use when she sees fit. Taken off the shelf for the right social events, and then put away when you don’t bring her enough attention. All this is just for her own enjoyment. She relishes in having something to complain about.”

He studied Tamara closely. “You loved her father. Her *real* father. Having her around just reminds you of that love that got away, and you *hate her* for that.” Tamara tried to summon up something vile, but shut up when Will said, “But you ruined that relationship. He walked away from you. Knowing that you were pregnant. Knowing that you loved him. Because he can’t *stand* you, can he?”

Tamara started crying.

Will moved on to Jeffrey. “You love your daughter,” he said softly. “You do. Even though she reminds you of that man, too. You see him every time you look into her eyes. But you still want to be a good father, because she’s the only child you have. The only child you think you’ll *ever* have.” Will’s gaze turned pitying. “You resent the wished children because of that, don’t you? Because you *can’t* have children. Not in the traditional sense. Yet even though you’re desperate for one, the world won’t grant you a wished baby.” He jerked his head at Tamara. “The world won’t give you one, because it takes two to wish a baby from the sky and your wife doesn’t want that with you.”

“You resent her for it,” Will said sadly. “And your daughter sees it. Sees the resentment you have for your wife, and your daughter, and for all the wished children. So she took out that anger that she got from you on our children, didn’t she? Because you raised her to hate them.”

Hannibal rubbed a soothing circle on the side of Will’s neck with his thumb.

Will closed his eyes, leaning into the touch and enjoying the shocked silence.

“H--how *dare you* ,” Tamara said, voice shaking. “That is not true-- we--!”

Will raised one of his hands and pushed his hair away from his forehead. It was faint, his sun. The mark still glittered gold in the right light, of course, but it didn’t glow from within like a child’s. “It *is* true what they say about the wished,” he murmured. “We see more than most.”

Stacey shouted, “It isn’t fair! It isn’t *fair!* ”

“Now, honey,” Jeffrey began.

Stacey shoved her father away and whirled on her mom. “Why don’t you love me?!” she demanded. She shrieked, “I hate you!” before darting from the room. Tamara hesitated for

only a moment before following. It was obvious her attempt to follow the girl was half-hearted.

Hannibal squeezed Will's shoulder, so he stood. Hannibal put a possessive hand on Will's lower back. He smiled at Will adoringly. Delighted about the return to their dynamic from so long ago. Enamored by Will's cutting words and the ruin they left behind.

Hannibal turned on Jeffrey. He smiled thinly. "It's a shame. I'm afraid I am not comfortable having our children exposed to a man who thinks so little of the wished." Hannibal sighed, pretending to be genuinely upset. "I'm afraid I can't back your organization any longer."

Jeffrey's knees shook for a second before he put his hands on the back of the chair his wife abandoned. "Now, Dr. Lecter--"

Hannibal held up a flat palm. "The matter is settled."

Jeffrey turned to Will instead, pleading. "Mr. Lecter--"

Will interrupted. "Doctor."

"What?"

"It's *Dr. Graham*-Lecter," Will said dismissively. Leaning into Hannibal's side, Will assumed the face of someone sad by what he saw. "As my husband said, we don't rub elbows with those who scorn the wished." Will tipped his head Hannibal's way. "Darling, I'm tired."

"Of course, mylimasis," Hannibal soothed. He kissed Will's forehead before he turned to Mr. Green. "Our children will honor the Academy's rules and stay home for the duration of their suspension. While it is true they were provoked, they shouldn't have resorted to physical violence." His gaze narrowed slightly. "I trust that the matter of harassment at the hands of Miss Haddock will be settled by the time they return to school."

Mr. Green nodded quickly. "Of course, Dr. Lecter. We will handle this matter with the utmost seriousness."

Satisfied, Hannibal led Will from the room by applying the slightest bit of pressure to his back.

Will waited until they were shut in the relative quiet of the car before he asked, "What does he do? Jeffrey?"

"He runs the most prestigious private music school in Baltimore."

Will hummed. "The one the kids go to in the summer and on Mondays?"

"The very same," Hannibal agreed smoothly. His lips quirked. "Though, I do believe it will be going out of business sooner than anyone would suspect."

Will laughed. “Of course. Who would want to leave their children in the hands of someone so racist?” Will said innocently.

They shared another laugh, and a happy smile.

Will realized absently that he’d *missed* this. With his whole heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the wonderful comments and kudos! I appreciate your support!
Next chapter, what you've all been waiting for! Will, Jack, Hannibal, and Alana all in one roooom. >:D

A Surprise

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In all fairness, Hannibal *did* try to tell Will. Tuesday afternoon, just after the ever annoying Franklyn Froideveaux finally had the decency to leave Hannibal's office, he had a rather unfortunate run-in with Will's least favorite co-worker. Which said a lot, as Will didn't like most of the people he worked with. Sure, Will respected the man and his drive, but the way he treated Will soured him far beyond the point of spoiled.

When Hannibal returned home that night, it was to the sight of Will and the twins in the kitchen. Covered in flour. Were they anyone else, the crime of dirtying his kitchen would be unforgivably rude. It was his sanctuary. The very heart of his home. Hannibal just smiled at the sight.

Florence had what appeared to be dough in her too-short hair, and as Hannibal watched, she tapped her brother on the nose with a batter-covered finger. He tried to smack her with the spatula, and she jumped back with a delighted shout. He chased her around the island twice before they noticed their Papa.

He held up a finger as they approached. "Do not get this suit dirty."

The twins exchanged a purely *devious* grin before charging as one to hug him. Hannibal managed to side-step their first attack, but he wasn't expecting Will to pin him from the side--his adorable husband ducked out of the kitchen's side door to trap him.

Will kissed Hannibal and spread batter all over his face in the process. He grinned and proudly said, "There. Now we match."

Hannibal (after changing into proper attire, of course) may have intentionally spilled more flour into Will's hair as revenge.

The evening was spent playing similar games. The twins and Will took the dogs to the park while Hannibal set the kitchen to rights. After, Florence insisted on watching a horror movie that left Will in stitches. Florence didn't like it when Hannibal pointed out every and all medical inaccuracies, but she deserved it for inflicting him to the travesty that was *Human Centipede.*

The twins went to bed after that, unsurprisingly both sleeping in Florence's room.

"Are you certain it is alright to let them continue like this?" Hannibal asked quietly. He closed the bedroom door behind himself.

"I would rather them share a bed than wake up to Florence in *our* bed," Will remarked. He put a sleeping Max down in the crib next to his side of the bed. "They'll stop once they feel

better about what happened. Give it a week or two, and they'll be back at each other's throats."

"It has already been four days since the incident at school," Hannibal pointed out.

Will smiled at him. "Would you have been settled were it Mischa getting her hair lopped off?" he challenged, knowing the answer.

Hannibal pursed his lips. He trusted Will with the secrets of her life and death. Perhaps the only person he'd ever *truly* loved, before Will and the children. Hannibal didn't particularly like it when his clever lover deemed it necessary to bring her up in an argument. Thankfully, Will did it sparingly, and only when he had a point to prove. "Very well," Hannibal relented.

Will closed the distance between them, a coy smile on his lips. He leaned up to brush his lips against Hannibal's in a chaste kiss. "They'll be alright," Will soothed.

Hannibal took the opportunity to run his hands down Will's back and over his ass. He squeezed gently. A good handful. Perfect for holding. "Ah, before I forget, I did have a rather interesting conversation this afternoon," Hannibal said.

Will ducked his head and started sucking on Hannibal's neck. "Yeah?"

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. He groaned when Will lightly bit the side of his throat. "Just as Franklyn left a--"

Hannibal sucked in a breath of surprise as Will abruptly shoved him onto the bed. He leaned down on his elbows and kissed all coherent thought from Hannibal's head. Will sat up, pulling his shirt off in one fluid motion. "I'm sure he was just as annoying as he usually is," Will said with a smirk. He slid down Hannibal's body and nuzzled the growing bulge in his slacks. "I know something that'll make you feel much better."

"Oh?" Hannibal mused.

In answer, Will undid Hannibal's fly with his teeth.

How could Hannibal *possibly* bring up Jack Crawford when Will sucked him down to the root and then rode him like he wanted to leave a permanent impression of Hannibal's pelvis on his backside?

Hannibal certainly wouldn't complain, nor would he ruin the mood. Since their little stint into cruelty in the principal's office the previous Friday, Will had been insatiable. He showed up during Hannibal's lunch break on Tuesday and rode him in the desk chair. He silently pushed Hannibal into the wall in the shower and fell to his knees three times in just as many days.

So, really, Will only had himself to blame when he walked into Jack Crawford's office on Wednesday afternoon and found Hannibal staring at the board of missing girls. Hannibal liked surprising his husband. Judging from the pinch of Will's eyebrows, he liked it decidedly less.

Alana was at his heels. She smiled at Hannibal. “Hannibal, good to see you!” she said. She walked his way and gave him a quick hug. Hannibal smiled at her. Happy to see his protégé. Happier to see the tick of jealousy in Will’s jaw.

“I see you brought little Max,” Alana said. She wiggled her fingers at the baby. Max tracked her finger with his eyes, but otherwise did not react.

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed. “Unfortunately, good childcare is impossible to find on such short notice. Luckily, Agent Crawford agreed it would be alright to bring him along today.”

“Your husband couldn’t watch him?” Alana asked.

“No,” Hannibal agreed with a sad sigh, “he works on Wednesdays. It would be remiss of me to ask him for assistance, when Wednesday is normally a day off for me.”

Alana put her hand on Hannibal’s wrist and squeezed. “If you need help, it really isn’t a big deal,” she murmured. “I’m happy to lend a hand.”

Before Hannibal could reply, Will bit out, “If you’re done playing house now, I think Jack wants to talk to us about some dead girls.”

“*Will,"* Jack admonished. “I apologize, Dr. Lecter. Will can get a little short when there are children involved.”

“It’s no trouble,” Hannibal said. He noted that of the three chairs in front of the desk, Will sat directly in the middle so Hannibal couldn’t sit next to Alana. So delightfully *petty* , his darling. Hannibal sat to his left. “Hello, Will.”

“Hannibal,” Will clipped back. His eyes narrowed. Angry, but not the sort of angry that left Hannibal with a broken jaw or a gunshot wound.

“You know one another?” Alana asked, surprised.

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed simply. These were people that Will worked with. He would leave it to his darling to decide how they should know. Considering Will’s wedding ring was mysteriously absent from his finger, he hadn’t quite worked up the courage to come out as married quite yet. Hannibal suspected it was more of a reluctance to share personal details with people he didn’t like as opposed to going back on their new arrangement.

Will sipped his coffee. He grimaced at the taste, but took another sip anyway. He would be happy when Hannibal presented him with a thermos from home. “Sometimes it feels like I’ll never get away from him,” Will muttered. He put his coffee loudly down and said, “Jackass.”

Hannibal chuckled, while Alana and Jack both seemed offended on his behalf. “Will!” Alana chided this time.

“It’s quite alright,” Hannibal said, waving her off. “I assure you, I am used to Will’s antics.”

“I wish I could get used to yours,” Will returned.

Max finally became clued into the fact that his other father was nearby, because he swiveled his head, saw Will, and let out a cry laced with joy. He babbled and reached for Will with his useless little baby hands.

Will's cold expression melted. He took one of Max's hands. "Hey, little guy," he murmured. "Missed me that much, huh?" He glanced up at Hannibal, who smiled and took the silent cue to pass Will their youngest child.

With another happy babble, Max nuzzled his little face into Will's neck. He couldn't hold up his own head yet, wouldn't be able to for another two months, but he did his best. Will cradled the back of his neck and rubbed a soothing circle on Max's back.

Alana and Jack were *shocked.*

Will raised an eyebrow at Jack in particular. "What?" he asked defensively. "I know how to hold a baby."

Hannibal smoothed the front of his suit. "How many confessions so far?" he asked, effectively changing the subject.

Jack launched into a rant about someone posting the dead girl's photo all over the internet, and a brief aside about everyone's least favorite journalist, before Will got up and started to pace in front of the photos.

"We found antler velvet in the wounds," Jack said.

"In some cultures, antlers are associated with healing," Hannibal said. "Perhaps he was trying to mend what was broken."

Will hummed and tapped the photo of Elise dead and in bed. Close to something. Hannibal watched him curiously, always happy to watch Will's beautiful mind work. The usual picture was made even better by Max's sleepy presence in his arms. Will bounced his arms ever so slightly, an absent gesture honed during the infancy of the twins.

"So now he's healing them?" Jack grumbled. "What kind of a psychopath tries to *heal*?"

"Maybe something was different about her," Alana suggested. "Something that set her apart from the other girls. Maybe he realized, after he killed her, that she didn't fit his victim profile."

Will went still. Alana's comment triggered something in his brain. His head tipped to the side, and he mouthed something to himself. Hannibal couldn't see him to make out the words, but he didn't have to wait long, because Will asked, "Was anything taken from the body?"

Jack shook his head. "Not from the preliminary autopsy, no. She got transferred to our facility an hour ago. Labs aren't back yet. Zeller said her liver'd been removed, and then put back in. From what we can tell, she's whole. Just cut in a few places."

Will said, “There’s something wrong with the meat.” Will closed his eyes. Tense. He looked at Hannibal when he said, “He’s eating them.”

“What?” Jack asked, dumbfounded.

Will turned to face them fully. Sure of himself, now. Hannibal saw it in the set of his chin. “He’s eating them,” Will said again.

“How did you come to that conclusion?” Hannibal asked, curious. Will’s leaps in deductions were astounding, even to him.

Will paced to the far side of the room. “He’s a hunter. That’s why he knows about the healing properties of the antler velvet, and why he had some to leave in the wounds. This is an apology. He’s sorry that he can’t make use of her can’t-- can’t *love* her the same way he has all the other girls.”

“He loves them?” Jack echoed dubiously. “...So he *eats* them?”

“As much as he can, in his own way,” Will murmured. “He has to eat them. Use every part. Otherwise, he isn’t honoring them.”

Jack scowled. “What kind of psychopath loves his victims?”

“He’s likely obsessed, devoted in his own mind. Just because these killers do not love the same way as you or I, it does not mean they are incapable,” Hannibal interjected. “Many killers have reported loving their victims, particularly those who stalk their prey. Some even claim to have loved their families; their children and spouses.”

“Families,” Will mumbled.

Will zoned out on a fixed point on the wall. His gentle rocking stopped. The hand on Max’s head tightened minutely. Will’s lips moved silently. A blink, and then he was back. Will let out a long, shuddering breath. “He has a daughter. Same age. Same--same everything. She’s an only child. Leaving for college soon. He’s terrified of losing her. She’s his golden ticket.”

Jack asked, “How is he finding them? They’re from all over the east coast.”

“College tours. All of the missing girls toured at least one campus before they went missing,” Will said with grim certainty. “We need lists of which schools the girls toured. Somewhere, on the orientation lists, there’ll be overlap. He’s going to the tours-- probably with his daughter-- that’s how he’s finding all these girls.”

“It *is* orientation season,” Hannibal agreed grimly.

“It’ll take hours to figure it out from those lists alone,” Jack said unhappily. He ran his hand over his head in frustration.

Will didn’t offer any further insight. He focused on Max in his arms. Hannibal knew he was mentally recalibrating-- pulling himself out of this campus killer’s shoes. Their children

always worked wonders in grounding Will.

"We'd best hope the autopsy proves fruitful," Hannibal said.

Jack nodded. He sighed. "I'll go check in with the team. Good work, Will." He nodded his chin in farewell. "Thank you for your time, Dr. Bloom, Dr. Lecter." Then he left.

Alana stood. "It's amazing you got all that from pictures," she told Will.

Will shrugged. "The evidence was there," he said. "It just took a while to see it all as one piece."

Alana nodded along. Curious about Will from a professional standpoint. She harbored something of a crush on Will at one point, but Hannibal swiftly set her attentions elsewhere. Will might humor flirtation with scathing comments and a glare or two, but Hannibal killed when the emotion struck. Will was *his*.

Hannibal smiled at his husband, standing close enough to ease Max from his arms. Will's frown twitched. "I can hold him," Will said.

"Are you planning on keeping him for the rest of the afternoon?" Hannibal teased. "I'm sure you have a lecture to teach."

Will glanced at his watch. "Not for another hour."

"And what, pray tell, am I supposed to do in the meantime?" Hannibal mused.

"That isn't my problem," Will said flatly. He held out his arms for Max. "I wasn't done."

Hannibal huffed in amusement and handed Max back.

"Will," Alana scolded, "even if you're friends, you're being rude! You can't just take his baby."

Will kissed the top of Max's head. He didn't comment further. He didn't even *look* at Alana. He said, a touch petulantly, "I'm hungry." He knew Hannibal wouldn't come all this way without food.

Hannibal smiled in earnest. "I just so happened to bring enough lunch for all of us," he said. "Jack as well, but it seems he's abandoned us in favor of greener pastures."

"I'd hardly call the labs *greener pastures,*" Will said. "Always smells like bleach and death down there."

"What a delightful mix," Hannibal said. He retrieved his lunch tote and thermos from beneath one of the chairs. "Shall we relocate to the cafeteria?"

"We can use my office," Will said. He led the way, his focus back on Max.

Alana trailed behind Will, and kept looking between them. Hannibal wondered how long it would take her to figure it out. “How long have you known each other?” she asked.

“Several years,” Hannibal said. “Will and I became acquainted when I lived in Europe.”

“Oh, right-- Will, you lived in France for a while, right?” she asked.

Will nodded. “I lived all over. Academic circles are smaller there, if you can believe it,” he said. “I could be in France or the UK and people were regurgitating Hannibal’s bullshit.”

“Will doesn’t like my paper on social exclusionism,” Hannibal remarked.

“Because it’s garbage,” Will said snidely. “There is documented evidence of how seclusion affects the mind. Solitary confinement in particular has extreme effects on the psyche.”

“Ah, but my paper focused on the social aspects of--”

“I know,” Will said, rudely cutting him off. “We’ve had this conversation before. Two times, at least.”

“Closer to six by my estimation,” Hannibal said happily.

Will rolled his eyes. He shifted Max to his hip and unlocked his office door with his other hand. Will’s office was organized chaos. Books and papers piled along the walls and on his desk. Will gave Max back only long enough to clear the wooden surface and then reclaimed the child. Will eased back into his chair with a groan.

Alana sat on the other side of the desk. Not sure of her place now. Unsettled by Will and Hannibal’s familiarity. Unsure of what it meant. Hannibal saw her glance at Will’s empty ring finger and dismiss the idea of their marriage in the same breath. She should rely more on her instincts, rather than her perceptions of the men she clearly knew less about than she thought.

“What did you bring?” Alana asked Hannibal.

Hannibal proudly said, “Southern-style sausage gumbo with a whole-wheat roux, and basil, parsley, onion, potatoes, and okra. I made the sausage myself. It’s a simple seasoning. Lots of butter and black pepper.”

Will’s smile gentled. “You made my favorite,” he said.

“Consider it an apology for my analytical ambush,” Hannibal said smoothly. He gave Will the first, and largest portion, before handing one to Alana and retrieving a third for himself.

“You could have told me Jack asked for you.”

“Yes, I could have,” Hannibal agreed.

Will stared at him for a moment. Then, the lightbulb lit up. “He asked you to profile me, didn’t he?” Will asked.

Alana frowned. “I *told* him not to. I know how much you hate psychiatrists poking around in your head. He asked for a reference for a level-headed, trustworthy person. I didn’t realize it was for you, Will.” Her tone suggested an apology, but she didn’t say the words outright.

Will shrugged. He took a happy bite of the gumbo before he replied. “It isn’t the first time Jack has tried to shove a shrink onto me. He thinks that I’ll agree to joining his team full-time if I have a “stable anchor”,” he said, making air quotes. “Like that has anything to do with why I say no.”

“Why *do* you say no?” Alana asked curiously. She wore the same face she did during Hannibal’s lectures. Hannibal recognized the hunger to learn in her features.

“I have a life outside of all this,” he said drily. “Some people might not think it’s much of one, but I like my freetime. I don’t actually *enjoy* getting dragged all over the county. I have a house. Yardwork. I have five dogs to take care of. I can’t just leave the state at the drop of a hat.”

“I thought you had four dogs,” Hannibal said. He narrowed his eyes at Will. Yes, he was quite certain there were only four dogs in the house. Encephalitis, Napoleon, Buster, and Brutus.

Will smirked at him. “I found another stray Sunday night. I think I’ll call him Winston.”

Arno and Will elected to return to Wolftrap on Sunday. Just for the afternoon. They wanted to get their fishing equipment from the woods, where they abandoned it after Will fell, and to make sure that the house didn’t suffer any damage during the storm. They returned a bit distracted. Hannibal assumed it was because of the bad memories their little trip brought-- not because Will elected to bring yet another dog into the house.

Hannibal frowned, which made Will’s smile wider, confirming Hannibal’s suspicions. Florence and Arno both vanished into the dogs’ room first thing on Monday morning. He should have known.

“Are you going to keep him?” Alana asked. “Five is a lot of dogs.”

“I’ve had eight at once,” Will mused. “Five is nothing.”

“Wow,” Alana said.

Will shrugged. “I like dogs.”

Hannibal ate his gumbo in quiet contemplation as Will spoke at length about the dogs. He certainly couldn’t bully Will out of keeping this one. He already named it-- so Hannibal knew it was a lost cause. It was karma, he supposed. Perhaps he should have tried harder to inform Will of his visit to Quantico. If he had, maybe Will would have fessed up about the new dog.

Well. No matter.

No sense in crying over shattered glass.

“Hannibal, don’t you have a dog?” she asked.

Hannibal blinked. It took a moment to realize she was asking about Brutus. Hannibal shook his head. “My children have a dog. He is their responsibility, and they take care of him. I take little part in it.”

“They’re so responsible. I feel like most parents end up doing the work once they get a dog for their kids,” Alana said.

“The twins are very well behaved,” Hannibal agreed. “They know that if they did not take care of the dog, they would not have a dog. That is all.”

Alana laughed. “Did you know he has *three* kids?” she asked Will. “I had no idea until recently. I swear, he keeps them more underwraps than Fort Knox’s security.”

She clearly expected Will to say *no.* That would solidify her and Hannibal’s friendship as deeper than that of his and Will’s in her mind. It would help dampen the feelings of unease she felt.

Will just smiled and said, “Of course. Florence, Arno, and *little Maximilian*.” He cooed Max’s full name, kissing the baby’s cheek and earning a delighted squeal.

Alana stilled. Her hand tightened on her spoon. She didn’t know his full name before now.

The rest of lunch passed with little fanfare. They discussed the case, and Will asked after Hannibal’s search for a nanny. Promising candidates, but nothing more thus far. Alana commented here and there, but spent more time watching than she did talking.

Will waited until the bell signaling the end of the hour chimed before reluctantly handing Max back. Hannibal handed him the thermos to ease the blow, and Will took it with a smile. He saluted them with it before making his way to his class.

Hannibal accompanied Alana to the parking lot. She was quiet until they got to their cars. Contemplative. “I didn’t know you and Will were so close,” she remarked.

“I’ve been told we make an odd pair,” Hannibal replied.

“I’ve brought him up before,” Alana said. “Why didn’t you tell me you knew him?”

Hannibal shrugged. “You seemed to have formulated your own opinions of him without my assistance. Besides, Will is a deeply private man. I wouldn’t do anything to betray his confidence; his trust is near impossible to earn back once lost.”

Hannibal knew from experience. It took a year of groveling to make Will forgive him. Even then, it was only by the grace of their children that Will made an effort to mend their scorched bridge to begin with.

“Still,” Alana said. She nervously tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. “I just feel like there’s so much I don’t know about you. I thought we were such good friends and yet…” She trailed off, and put a hand on his forearm. “I feel like you’re hiding so much from me.”

Hannibal considered his response carefully. It wouldn’t do to lose Alana as a friend. He truly enjoyed her company. She was clever and bright. He enjoyed her stern analysis and brevity.

However.

Hannibal meant what he said-- he wouldn’t betray Will’s trust. Will would be the one to tell her. They put their relationship on the back burner at Will’s request. It was only fair that Will made the decisions when it came to dragging them back into the limelight. Hannibal had to move at Will’s pace, lest he scare Will back into hating him.

“I will have you both over for dinner sometime soon,” Hannibal said. He squeezed the hand Alana put on his arm. “It would make me happy to see two of my closest friends grow even closer.”

She smiled. Placated, but still suspicious. Hannibal smiled back. He hoped she cornered Will about it sooner, rather than later. And he hoped, even more than that, that he was there to see the look on her face when she found out.

Chapter End Notes

Yet another update for you!~
I swear, I forget how to write Hannibal's perspective if I don't write it all the time.
As always, comments and kudos are appreciated! <3

Red Suits

Chapter Summary

Please heed ALL of the tags.
This chapter has a depiction of a crime scene.
Nothing toooo graphic, but still.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will pulled up to dark windows. He killed the ignition in the garage and walked into the house. Quiet. No dogs on the wood or cooking in the kitchen. Will frowned and kicked off his shoes. On socked feet he padded further into their home.

He found Arno first.

Face-down in the living room. Red as a beet. Struggling to breathe.

Will ran to his side. “Arno!” he said. He held his son in his arms, the boy gasping. “What happened?” he demanded.

Arno, drool on his chin and a haze in his eyes, said, “*Flo--* ” he mumbled, “he got *Flo--”*

The living room bent around him. The paintings began to melt. Water dripped from the floorboards above him.

No, not water.

Blood .

Thick crimson ribbons dyed the carpet and the wallpaper. It dripped down over the legs of the couch and quickly rose around his knees. Desperate, fighting a current that threatened to tear him off his feet, Will fought his way to the staircase. He struggled to hold his gasping son in his arms.

When he next looked down, little Arno didn’t have a face anymore.

Will, eyes watery with tears, found Florence at the top of the stairs. Her little body broken–curled in on itself. A trail of her blood went from her bedroom to where she lay. Will picked her up, too.

The cut went from one temple to the other, looping down to curve toward the corner of her left eye. A curtain of blood dyed her face below the mark. Her moon pulsed weakly. It

smeared across the front of her nightgown. Down to her knees and the cuts on her hands.

"Papa," she said weakly.

They were both so small and so cold. Will gave them each a kiss on the forehead. He had to get to them. He knew how it would end. He always knew how it would end. But he still went. He trudged down the dark hallway. Snowflakes fell lazily outside. Peace beyond the windows. The quiet stillness of winter settled over their view of the Arno River.

Hannibal knelt with his back to the door.

Shirtless.

Blood on his shoulder.

Shaking.

He turned to look at Will. Face ashen. Blood on his cheeks. A little handprint on his chin.

The body next to him didn't matter.

The body in his arms did.

So, *so,* small. Too small.

"I couldn't–" Hannibal choked, "–I tried, I– *Will* ." Tears dripped down his cheeks. Constant. Desperate. Haunted. *Another child he loved and couldn't save.*

Will looked at the bloody mess of blankets in Hannibal's arms. A wispy head of brown hair stuck out of the top of the blankets.

Will.

Will knelt, the twins falling out of his arms. Lifeless. Little dolls. No faces. No breath. No heartbeat in their chests.

Will!

Will reached for the blanket, tugging it back, *knowing what he would see.*

" Will!" Hannibal said again. He hovered above Will, his hands on Will's shoulders in a crushing grip. His sleep-mussed hair fell into his eyes. No blood smeared across his bare torso. Just concern on his brow. "You were having a nightmare," Hannibal soothed. "You're safe. It's September 20th, at 3:45 AM. Your name is Will Graham. You're in Baltimore, Maryland."

Will held the hands on his biceps. "It's September 20th. 3:45 AM," Will echoed hoarsely. He must have screamed. "My name is Will Graham. I'm in Baltimore, Maryland."

Hannibal pressed his forehead to Will's. "Welcome back, darling," he soothed. He kissed Will gently.

"I never left," Will replied numbly. His eyes drifted to the crib on the far side of the room. Max was there. Whole and safe.

"You did," Hannibal said.

Will laughed quietly. "Where would I go, Hannibal?"

Hannibal kissed him again. A soft reassurance. For both of them. "Into the dark depths of your mind. Into the nightmares where I cannot follow."

"You can," Will murmured. He peeled away from Hannibal and padded across the room. He stood over Max. He was so small. His little belly rising with each breath he took. A onesie covered with running dogs and hotdogs clung to his chubby legs. "That nightmare lives with you, too."

Warm lips pressed against the back of Will's neck. He didn't say anything; but he didn't need to. Hannibal settled his hands on Will's hips, and Will leaned back against his husband's chest.

They stared down at their sleeping son for a long time. Eventually, Hannibal tugged Will back toward the bed. "Come, mylimasis. We should sleep."

Will looked up at him. "Can he sleep with us?"

Hannibal's smile softened. "Of course." He kissed the crown of Will's head. Carefully, he picked up their sleeping son. Max stirred, but didn't wake.

They rolled the covers down to their waists and put the baby between them. With the fire crackling in the corner, the room was warm enough without a blanket. Will put his hand on Max's stomach. The baby's chest rose and fell.

Steady.

Alive.

- - - - -

Will drifted down the stairs behind Hannibal first thing the following morning. He bounced Max on his hip, the little tot already awake. Max tucked his head under Will's chin and babbled quietly.

"I'll heat the formula," Hannibal said, cutting off Will's path to the fridge. "Why don't you two just sit down, hm?"

Will rolled his eyes, but sat in the plush chair in the corner. He watched Hannibal go through the motions of preparing the formula and heating it up to the perfect temperature. Will loved the domesticity of it. He loved the way their hands brushed when Hannibal passed him the bottle. The little sounds of Max eating. And, once Hannibal returned to the stove, the smooth movements of his husband's hands. Confident as he moved egg from shell to pan. The fluidity of the flick of his wrist as he scrambled Arno's breakfast.

Their eldest son joined them, likely woken by the scent of cooking food. He perked at the sight of Will. "Morning, Dad," he said happily. He came in for a hug, careful not to disturb Max in his perch on Will's lap.

"Good morning, buddy," Will replied.

"Good morning, Papa," he said politely when they parted. He padded quietly to the stove to peer over Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal explained his recipe in smooth French, quizzing Arno about some of his vocabulary.

Will leaned into the plush chair. Relaxed. He kept a close eye on Max, who seemed to be a big eater just like his sister, while listening in on his husband and his son's morning ritual. Will didn't interrupt. He enjoyed sitting by and watching them in their natural element.

Will was surprised when Hannibal broke them out of their usual path, saying, "Mažasis, please go wake your sister."

Arno seemed surprised, too, but not upset. He said, "Okay." He left the room.

"Have something planned?" Will questioned.

Hannibal smiled at Will, a little twinkle in his eye. "I just might."

Will stood and burped Max, Hannibal moving to take the empty bottle from him without being asked. They shared a lingering kiss.

"I'm glad we have this," Will murmured.

Hannibal dipped closer to kiss him again. "We always will," he soothed.

Florence arrived with a yawn and a mumbled, "What is it?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, turning to greet her. She had a robe over her pajamas, just like Hannibal. A mini Count Lecter in the making. "Is that the proper way to greet your parents, mažoji?"

Sucking her lips between her teeth, she reluctantly shook her head. "I'm sorry. Good morning, Papa. Good morning, Dad."

She moved to sit at the counter, but Hannibal said, "Please take a seat at the table. I'd like to have breakfast together." He nodded to the small informal table in the corner.

Curious, Will did as he asked. The twins sat in their usual places. Truthfully, they never sat as a family for breakfast unless they had an early outing planned. Hannibal fed himself and Arno first, and then Florence and Will whenever they rolled out of bed. The twins usually loitered in the kitchen until everyone was done eating, but sometimes they made themselves scarce to finish a project or a hobby.

Hannibal plucked Max out of Will's arms and put him into the carrier on his chest. Then he served them each a steaming plate of protein scramble and fresh toast. Little glass jars full of goodies like jam and honey appeared in the middle of the table. The twins dug in with gusto, though each kept an eye on Hannibal.

Will ate slowly. He never felt particularly hungry after nightmares, but Hannibal was also a *very* good cook.

Halfway through the meal, Hannibal put his fork down. He dabbed the corner of his mouth with his cloth napkin, and then said, "I have a proposition to make."

The twins and Will turned to look at him expectantly. Max burped.

Hannibal folded his hands in front of himself. "It has been a while since we last went out as a family. I thought it might be nice to head into town. There is an opera I would like to see next weekend, and I believe both Florence and Arno need new clothing for such an occasion." Florence perked, but Arno made a face.

"What's in it for me?" Will asked teasingly.

"There is a lovely fly-fishing shop a block away from my tailor's, as well as that little diner that Arno adores," Hannibal replied.

Arno perked. "You'll take us to *Penny's* ?" he asked excitedly.

Penny's was a small hole-in-the-wall diner, located in an old building in Baltimore. Arno loved their greasy burger and burned fries. Hannibal very much did not. It was usually a treat for when Arno and Florence went out with Will– without their Papa– on rare occasions.

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. He smiled. All smooth and unbothered. "It is your favorite restaurant. It would be remiss of me to bribe your father and your sister, but not you."

Arno beamed.

Florence had perked up, too. "Can I get a new dress, Papa? Like the one we saw last time?"

Hannibal smiled indulgently. "We will see," he said. The anticipation he tried to hide told Will that whatever dress grabbed her attention the last time she accompanied Hannibal was likely already ready to go in her size.

It took a while to get everyone showered and dressed, but before too long they were walking the streets of downtown Baltimore. Florence held Hannibal's hand, talking excitedly about a dress design she saw on Instagram. He listened eagerly. Happy to be the focus of her

attention. Happy to spoil her. Anticipating the boost to his ego from his daughter's adoration and appreciation.

The sight made Will smile. He worried, a lifetime ago, that a megalomaniac like Hannibal would never love their children. His worries were unfounded. Hannibal loved his children obsessively; the twins were an extension of his influence. Proof of the bond between him and Will. A physical manifestation of his hold over Will, and their love in equal measure.

Arno murmured, "Can we sneak out when they get caught up in it?"

"Of course," Will whispered back.

Signore Lorenzo greeted them with big smiles and a hearty laugh. The big man didn't look like a tailor at a glance, but he fell into the role quickly. He put slim frames onto his nose and targeted Arno first. He knew, from experience, that Will and his son would slip off if left unattended for too long.

Meanwhile, his wife Nicoletta ushered Florence into the back to try on a dozen dresses already cut to her size. She squealed and dashed in ahead of the old woman. Will was happy to see *her* happy. Hannibal drank it in like a man stuck without water in a desert.

Arno begrudgingly let himself be fitted for several suits. He didn't protest any of Hannibal's color or pattern choices, simply requesting something in green– his favorite color– when prompted.

After Arno, it became Will's turn. Lorenz. smiled at Will, and said, "Perhaps hand off the little one, yes, Signore Lecter?" He eyed the way Will clutched Max to his chest like a shield.

Will grimaced, but handed the baby off to Hannibal. "My measurements are the same as last time, I'm sure."

Lorenzo eyed Will, but nodded. "I will check, just to be sure, but you and your husband are both delightfully predictable. The boot, however, will need the hem of your left leg let out."

Will eyed the cast. Right. He stepped up onto the box and let Lorenzo do his thing.

Florence emerged from the back in a stunning red gown. It hung just past her knees, the fabric fluffy without losing its shine. Will absently wondered if it was silk. It definitely looked expensive. Lace covered her arms and her neck, which also had a little bow on the front.

"You look gorgeous, Flo," Will praised.

She beamed and did another twirl. "Papa wants us to wear crimson at his next dinner party!" she said.

"Does he now?" Will mused. He shot a look at Hannibal, who winked at him.

"I thought it would be nice to gather our mutual acquaintances together for a little dinner party. Perhaps Alana and some of your co-workers. It could be quite enjoyable," Hannibal

said. Absolutely unrepentant.

"You're a bastard," Will said fondly.

Lorenzo stifled a laugh.

"But, first, the opera next weekend," Hannibal said firmly. "I believe blue would be an excellent choice," he said, focusing on Lorenzo and Nicoletta now. The couple was eager for their business. They both enjoyed working with Hannibal. His penchant for exploring bold fashion choices delighted the old Italians to no end. "Cobalt, to match Arno and Will's eyes."

Will zoned out, not caring about paisley vs floral patterns, or whether or not Florence's dress for the opera had an asymmetrical hem. She adamantly wanted one, but Hannibal argued that it might not suit the regal theme he wanted for the event.

Arno leaned against Will. They watched people walk by and cars roll out of sight.

"I think if we told the CIA about this, they'd use it on their prisoners," Arno said darkly.

Will laughed and kissed the top of his son's head.

They both startled when Will's phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out, frowning when he saw Jack's name flash on the screen. "Are you going to answer it?" Arno asked curiously.

Will glanced at Hannibal. Still wrapped up in the hem. "I don't have anything better to do," he said wryly. He answered with a gruff, "Graham."

" *Will* ," Jack said, " *how quickly can you get to Baltimore? I need you at a scene.* "

As always, no niceties. No questing *how are you today* ? No sign of a *sorry to inconvenience you, but could I get your help?*

Will wasn't even on his payroll full-time for fuck's sake.

"I'm in Baltimore," Will said slowly, "but I'm busy." He stepped out of the main room, to one on the side. He didn't want to interrupt whatever Hannibal was invested in. From the sound of it, the pattern on Arno's tie.

" *Whatever you're doing isn't more important than this crime scene. I've never seen anything like it,* " Jack said unhappily.

A hand appeared on his lower back. Hannibal. A questioning touch. Of course, Will couldn't step out of the room for more than literally ten seconds without Hannibal noticing. Florence and Arno circled around Will's front, openly trying to eavesdrop.

"You say that about a lot of crime scenes," Will replied drily. "Like I said, I have plans today." He raised an eyebrow at Hannibal.

Hannibal's brow pinched, and he shook his head.

Not a Ripper kill, then. Will didn't think so (Hannibal hated interference with family time), but one could never be too careful when married to a cannibal.

" *I'm sure they can wait* ."

"They really can't. I'm already out. I don't have my car with me."

" *I'll send one for you. Where are you?"*

" Out. Like I said the first time. Look, Jack, I'm with Hannibal, I can't just–"

" *Dr. Lecter is with you?"* Jack cut in. " *Great. Bring him, too. I'll text you both the address.* " And then he hung up.

Will scowled down at his black phone screen. "There's a scene somewhere in Baltimore. Jack wants us to swing by."

Hannibal's hand twitched on his waist. Will watched Hannibal weigh the opportunity to see Will work against his desire to have the day he planned without any changes. Will groaned when Hannibal said, "I suppose it would be remiss of us to miss a call from dear Uncle Jack. We *are* nearby. Lunch can wait."

Florence perked. "Can we go to a crime scene? Can we, Dad?"

"Please?" Arno asked.

Christ. Other kids asked to go to the amusement park. They asked for candy in the checkout aisle. They wanted an extra helping of dessert. Will's kids looked like they had the opportunity to meet Santa in the flesh when Hannibal suggested they take a detour to a *crime scene* .

Will knew when he'd lost. It was three pairs of eager eyes against him. "Fine," Will grumbled. "But *you* –" he pointed at the twins, "–are staying in the car with the baby. And you–" he poked Hannibal in his chest, "–are going to *behave* ."

Hannibal snagged the hand that poked him and kissed the back of it. "When do I not, mylimasis?"

"You're on thin ice right now, darlin'," Will muttered.

Hannibal grinned.

- - - - -

Will winced when they pulled up to the crime scene. The tarps and tapes corded off the area around a children's park. Never a good thing. The sight of blood on a bright yellow slide

made his stomach churn.

Will hated when they were kids.

Jack stormed their way the moment Hannibal parked. The twins probably peered out of the very tinted windows curiously, but nobody could see them. “Graham!” he barked. “What the hell took you so long? I’ve had the crime scene guys waiting so you can do your thing!”

“And they would have waited another *hour* if I wasn't already in town,” Will said back.

“We got here as quickly as we could,” Hannibal soothed.

Before Jack could get back on his soapbox, Will asked, “What do we have?”

Jack shook his head. “It’s best if you see for yourself.” He jerked his head back toward the crime scene, and they ducked under the tape.

Will’s gut twitched with sympathy at the sight that waited beyond the tape. It was all red. Crimson ribbons and raw vicera. The people here had been ripped apart. And it had to be people plural, with all the guts and skin he saw. He silently put on the gloves that a crime scene tech offered and faced the scene.

He ignored Jack’s seeking gaze, and Hannibal’s blatant excitement.

Will sucked in a deep breath, and let the pendulum swing.

They deserve it.

Heavy lungs, a broken heart. A desperate need to have his anger manifested. Someone needed to take all of this anger that he felt and take it for him.

Will stepped between chunks of flesh. He knelt, examining the bodies. They were small. Children’s fingers and toes stood out among the ruin. An adult’s, too. No– two adults. Two adults and their child.

They had to be punished.

For something they did?

No, for something they were .

They couldn’t help it anymore than he could help his anger. Will felt it creep down his throat and seep into his lungs. It hung in the air with his every exhale. It corroded his lungs a little more every time he breathed in. He couldn’t handle it anymore.

He saw them here, playing.

Happy .

And he snapped.

Will went for one of the parents, first. Stabbing him. Digging into him. The knife slid in so easily. So, so easily. He jerked back violently as the man fell to the ground at his feet. The anger paused with his surprise, but then it was back. The man was dying and the woman was screaming and he still didn't feel any better.

He gripped his bloody blade and ran for the wife. She screamed, trying to get the child from the slide. But the child was too high. They couldn't be reached quickly. Couldn't run themselves. The mother died, there. Still reaching for the child. Her blood stained the bright yellow slide.

Good.

Blood on her sunshine.

They deserved this.

The child slid down the slide, into the dying arms of their mother. The little boy screamed and cried. He called for his Mama, but Mama wouldn't answer.

How dare *he? He didn't deserve to cry! He didn't deserve anything! He shouldn't be* alive!

Will had to take the child apart.

He took his time.

Punishing the child. He made sure it hurt.

It was their fault. All their fault!

He ripped and tore and cut and hacked. It must have taken hours *to cut them apart. He was messy and desperate. Someone had to take this anger for him.*

After, silence.

Nighttime, now.

The anger lingered, but sickness rose up in his throat.

He threw up under the slide.

A hole. Hastily dug. He couldn't stand *the way they looked at him! Judging him, even while dead! He ripped out their eyes, but they wouldn't stop looking at him.*

They had to stop! He'd make them.

Will buried them, eyes and all, and then he ran.

"It's a family," Will said, coming back to himself with a gasp. "He couldn't stand to see them happy. They were too happy–too perfect. He hated them for it. But the–the kid. The kid was the target of it all. There was something different about the child th–that set him off."

Beverly, who looked *bothered* by a crime scene for once, chimed in, “We’ve got the heads over here,” she said quickly. The hole was at her feet. Messy. She shifted. Reluctant.

“And?” Jack pressed.

“It’s the son,” Beverly murmured. “The parents are normal but the kid he–he was *wished* .”

Will’s stomach dropped into his knees, and then Florence *screamed* .

Chapter End Notes

Comments do make my day!
Sorry about the lack of updates, the holidays got a bit away from me. :D I'm back now, though!

Crime and Punishment

Chapter Summary

Happy New Year, my dear readers!
I'm back from vacation!
Updates should be ~once a week, if all goes well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will shoved people out of his way. Black tinged the edge of his vision. Like he followed a tunnel, Will single-mindedly sought out their children. A familiar stock of curly red hair sent him to a darker place.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Will demanded.

Freddie Lounds whirled around, guilt and sheepishness crossing her face for about half a second before she smoothed her features into faux innocence. Only Hannibal’s firm hand on his elbow stopped Will from bashing the journalist’s head against the roof of the Bently.

Arno stood between Freddie and the car. He glowered at her, violent desire contorting his face and inching red up his pale skin. Will heard Florence quietly crying through the door. The world around them was deathly quiet.

Freddie smiled weakly. “I thought this was my car. I apologize, I wasn’t–”

“Bullshit,” Will snapped, “you were snooping.”

Indignantly, Freddie stood up a little straighter. How the vulture had the gall to act innocent after scaring their children, Will would never understand. “It was an *honest* mistake, Graham,” Freddie said snidely.

Hannibal dropped his hold on Will, and smoothed his hands down the front of his suit. “Miss Lounds,” he said, “considering I saw you arrive in a Jeep, I find it highly unlikely that you mixed up our vehicles.”

Freddie smiled a little wider. “I wasn’t paying attention. I had my phone out.” She laughed, trying to play it off. She waved the phone in her hand.

“She’s lying,” Arno said lowly.

Freddie turned and glared at him, opening her mouth to speak.

Hannibal held up a hand to silence her. “Step away from my son, please.”

Freddie glanced back at Arno, whose hands twitched at his side. She scoffed and stepped toward the tail of the car. Hannibal filled the space she left behind, pulling Arno into his side and kissing his head. Hannibal murmured something in quiet Italian.

Arno barked out a laugh. Bitter. “She climbed into the front seat, Papa. She had her phone out– *recording* .” He glowered at Freddie. “She didn’t notice us until Flo screamed.”

“I–” Freddie began.

“No,” Will rudely interjected. “No fucking excuses, Freddie. You can’t just open cars and go rifling through whatever you want.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal agreed. He put a proprietary hand on Arno’s neck. Soothing, Will knew from experience. For Hannibal, too. A physical claim. “Not only did you trespass on my property, you frightened my children, *including* my infant son.” He turned to a member of the Baltimore PD. “Please, arrest her. I would like to press charges, as she broke into my vehicle.”

“I didn’t break into it!” Freddie protested. “It was an honest mistake. The door was unlocked!”

“I am confident that I locked the door when I left the vehicle,” Hannibal said coldly. “I would not leave my children in an unlocked car so close to a crime scene.”

A member of the force shuffled over and put Freddie in cuffs. She squawked. “This is outrageous! I didn’t *do* anything! You can’t press charges over something like this!” She shrieked her way to the patrol car, even as they read her her rights.

“We probably won’t be able to get any charges to stick,” Will murmured.

“No,” Hannibal agreed, “but I will enjoy our lawyer’s ability to make her life miserable for the next several months.”

Will huffed. “This is going to turn into a piece about us, you know.”

Hannibal smiled, all teeth. “All the better. Tarlow and Mead have never lost a defamation case, mylimasis.”

Will rolled his eyes.

Arlo looked up from where he’d buried his face in Hannibal’s chest. “Can we go home?” he asked unhappily.

Will frowned. “You don’t want to go do *Sandy’s* for lunch?” Arno always wanted to go to *Sandy’s* .

The boy shook his head. “Florence is upset. We should just be done.”

“You are a good brother,” Hannibal praised. He petted down Arno’s hair back to the hold on his neck. “Comfort your sister. We will tell Jack we are leaving.”

Arno nodded and ducked back into the now quiet car.

Jack found them, so they didn’t have to go far. He looked sour. “I’m sorry about that, Dr. Lecter,” he said unhappily. “Lounds just doesn’t know when to quit. She has a vendetta against Will here, for some reason, and I’m sorry you got caught up in it.”

Hannibal shook his head. “It’s quite alright, Jack. I doubt any of us foresaw this. I will be excusing myself, however. I need to take my children home.”

Jack nodded in understanding. He and Hannibal shook hands, and then he turned to Will. “I’d like you to take another look. Did what Beverly said help you see the bigger picture at all?” Jack turned to walk back to the scene with Will in tow.

Will said, “Uh, Jack, I’m going to go, too.”

Jack scowled at him. “The doctor is going to take his family home, Will. Come on. I need you here.”

“No,” Will insisted. “You asked me to come look. I came and looked. I have plans, remember?”

Will saw it all in the twitch of Jack’s shoulders and the glance he gave Hannibal. An apology for Will. Annoyance at Will’s lack of understanding. Pity, because Jack thought Will (empath Will!) couldn’t understand that Hannibal’s children needed him.

Irritation crawled down Will’s spine like a clutter of spiders. He could practically feel their legs digging little pricks into his skin and the small beads of blood dripping down his back. They were *his* children, too.

“Come here for a second,” Jack barked. “Excuse us, Dr. Lecter.” He grabbed Will’s elbow and steered him away from the car. Hannibal watched with a pinched frown.

Once they were out of earshot of anyone else, Will yanked his elbow back. “What?” he demanded.

“You’re out of line,” Jack hissed.

“Excuse me?”

Jack put his hands on his hips. “I get that the idea of having a family is nice, Will. I get that it’s easy for you to empathize with what Dr. Lecter is going through. I *do* .” There was that pity again, back on his face. “But you’re not their family. Those kids don’t need your help.”

“You don’t know what they need,” Will snapped.

Jack patted Will’s shoulder. Condescending. Like he was a fucking child. “I know you’ve been getting closer to Dr. Lecter, but this isn’t appropriate, Will.”

The spiders were back, on the edge of his jaw now. Urging Will to open his mouth wide and spew vitriol. He was stopped by hands on his arm. Will startled. She was always so *quiet* . Mini Count Lecter, indeed. Florence blinked up at him, still teary eyed and scared. She sniffled. “I wanna go home,” she lamented.

Will smiled gently at her. “I know, hon. We’ll go right now.”

Jack looked between them. Florence, and her curly, wild hair, and Will with the same. Florence looked more like Will than usual. With her hair long, her curls were weighed down and not quite as wild. With her hair cropped so short, she looked more like Will than Hannibal. Will saw the *moment* Jack realized that Florence was Will’s child. He froze, a flush crawling up his neck. A glance at Will’s left hand. Back to Florence. Confusion. Thoughts bubbling over. Jack couldn’t mesh his mental picture of Will with this new information.

The Will Jack knew was a loner– out in Wolftrap with no family. A weird, twitchy man. Too unstable to be standard FBI. *That* Will couldn’t be a family man. A doting father. A man with a healthy, stable relationship.

Jack grunted, “Fine. But I want you to review the documents as soon as I get them to you.” With another confused glare at Will, Jack stomped back over to the crime scene. He only said goodbye to Hannibal, too.

“I find his lack of manners concerning,” Hannibal remarked as Will and Florence rejoined him at the car.

Will sighed. “That’s Jack.”

They all climbed in, ready to get the hell out of there. The kids were quiet. Arno held Florence close, who held a sleepy Max. Max babbled at Will when he turned to look at them. “Hi, buddy,” he said.

Max beamed.

“You okay, Flo?” Will asked.

Florence nodded. “She– um– she startled me, Dad.”

“I know, hon,” Will agreed. He reached back and squeezed her shoulder. “Papa and I will make sure that she gets in trouble.”

“The lawyers will delight in the opportunity to make her life very difficult,” Hannibal said happily.

Florence peeked at Hannibal. “Can I punish her, Papa? Please?”

Hannibal smiled sweetly at their daughter. “What is my rule, Florence?” he prompted.

She chewed on her lip before sighing. “No hunting people we were seen with in public for three years,” she diligently parroted.

“And why is that?” Hannibal pressed.

“Because it’s the safest way to be,” Florence muttered.

“Brilliant girl,” Hannibal praised. “But as Ms. Lounds is a regular nuisance, I believe we could bring her to our table much sooner than the normal pig.”

Florence flushed happily. She sat up straighter, and Will watched as more of her anxiety left her. She said, “We can still eat lunch, if you want, Arno.”

Arno glanced at his sister. “But you’re upset.”

She shook her head. “I’m okay now. I feel fine.”

He stared doubtfully at his sister.

“Seriously!” she insisted. “I think pancakes will help me feel even better.”

Arno frowned a little more.

Taking it out of his hands, Will said, “We can go. But if you get nervous because of the crowd, we’re coming home.”

Florence beamed. “Okay!” she agreed.

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“Lunch was nice,” Will murmured. Hannibal smiled at him, happy to be praised indirectly. Lunch *had* been his idea, after all. The twins took to the cheap diner food with gusto. By the end of lunch, it was like the run-in with Freddie never happened. Will still got to go to the fly-fishing shop, and Florence begged her way into a new pair of low heels.

Will sipped his whiskey and watched his husband cook dinner. Max slept in the bedroom upstairs, the baby monitor taking up a corner of the counter. The little tyke was out cold. He didn’t do any sleeping all day– too distracted by the big, wide world. Max made up for it the moment they got home, crashing immediately.

Florence followed quickly after, retreating to her room to listen to music and practice her cello. Arno dutifully trailed behind her. The two of them wouldn’t reemerge until dinner.

“Jack knows,” Will said.

Hannibal twitched, glancing over his shoulder. “How much?” he questioned.

“I’m not sure,” Will admitted. “He knows Flo is mine.”

“The resemblance is striking,” Hannibal agreed. He hummed thoughtfully. “I suppose I may move up my plans for our dinner party, then. It wouldn’t do to have more people find out where I cannot see their reactions.”

Will huffed. “That’s your priority?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said lightly. “It is all very amusing.”

Will rolled his eyes. “You’re very lucky that I like this side of you.”

“I am indeed,” Hannibal said. He stepped away from the stew, content to let it simmer for the time being. He wiped his hands on a small towel and prowled around the counter to where Will stood. He put his hands on Will’s hips. “Why wouldn’t I be delighted to finally show off what is *mine* ?” he asked huskily. Will shivered. “My children. My husband. My family.”

Will put his free hand on Hannibal’s stomach. “You’re ours, too.”

Hannibal flashed an all-tooth smile. “Yes. I’m their father. Their guiding light. I have more influence over the growth of our children than any other, aside from you, mylimasis. And then there is my husband. Brilliant and cruel and violent and all mine. Mine to mold and push. Mine to hold and keep.”

Hannibal plucked the half-full whiskey glass out of Will’s hand and put it on the counter. He proceeded to box Will against it, strong arms caging him in from either side.

“Tell me, Will,” Hannibal murmured into his ear, “how much satisfaction do *you* feel, for keeping a monster on a leash? Are you not satisfied, knowing that you, and you alone, have seen me for all I am?”

Will moaned quietly. He did like it. That sense of power. He could call Hannibal off hunts, if he wanted. Stop him from displaying his work all together with a mere word. The Ripper ripped, but Will was the one who allowed him to hold a knife.

Will licked his lips. “Do we have time?” he asked quietly.

Hannibal nipped Will’s lip. “The stew needs to simmer for twenty minutes. We have time.” He pushed Will towards the pantry, shoving him to the floor.

Will landed with a hiss, knocking the meat of his palm against the floor. He scrambled to open the hidden door. Once he had it open, he quickly moved down the steps. Hannibal locked it with a small hook behind them. Just in case the children came looking. Will flicked on the lights and moved past the sheets of plastic hanging from the ceiling. The surgical table was large, polished steel. Will smoothed his hand over it. It was cold to the touch.

Hands landed on his hips. Will startled for the second time that day, and huffed out a laugh. “You’re too quiet,” he complained.

Hannibal nipped the cartilage along the top of Will’s ear. “All the better to hunt you down,” Hannibal murmured.

Will rocked his hips back against Hannibal's. "Well, we don't have all the time in the world, darlin'. You better get to pouncing."

Hannibal chuckled darkly and bit down on Will's shoulder. Hard.

He slipped Will's pants down his hips, pushing Will belly-down onto the surgical table at the same time. Hannibal must have already had lube in his pocket or nearby, because Will heard the click of the cap before Hannibal poured the chilly liquid between Will's cheeks.

"It's a shame we don't have time," Hannibal mused. "Or I'd prep you more."

Will frowned. "Wha–" his question was cut off with a shout as Hannibal buried himself deep. It was too tight. Too dry. Hannibal must have done a prefuntonary slickening of his own length, but it wasn't nearly enough.

Will's vision hazed. He could only focus on the burn and bright starbursts of pleasure as Hannibal hammered his prostate with unnerving accuracy. He said something in a teasing voice, but Will couldn't make it out. He was too focused on the fire between his thighs.

Hannibal tugged Will's arms behind himself, holding him by the wrists in a vice-grip as he pounded into Will.

Will heard something.

Maybe the timer upstairs?

But Hannibal didn't stop.

He just *kept going.*

Will, dazed and drooling, finally recognized the shrill sound as Hannibal's phone. Will groaned in protest when Hannibal's silky tie was suddenly shoved into Will's mouth. He bit around the fabric, smothering a cry as Hannibal cruelly dug his fingers into the fresh bite mark on Will's shoulder.

"Dr. Lecter speaking," Hannibal clipped into his phone. Will tried to squirm out from under him. Hannibal wrapped his free hand around Will's neck and squeezed in warning. Will stilled. Trapped by the pants around his thighs, he couldn't do much beyond wiggle in place, anyway, but he held very still. Hannibal rewarded Will with a smooth hand down his flank. Gentle. "Ah, yes. Hello, Jack."

Will tensed, and Hannibal thrust his hips again.

Will whined quietly.

"No, not interrupting," Hannibal assured Jack. "I'm just finishing dinner for the children."

Jack said something that made Hannibal humm. He picked up one of Will's legs, sliding Will's pants to the floor. One of Will's knees joined him on the table. Hannibal rocked in deeper, and Will moaned.

Will's cock slid against the table, cold and wet. He wanted to come. Trapped between his body and the table, he could get there. Will started to hump the table, seeking his own release. Hannibal chuckled and let him.

"I would be happy to," Hannibal said. "Say, two hours? The children have had a difficult day. I hate to take more of your time than necessary, but I don't want to interrupt their routine."

A pause.

Nails carding down Will's back. Will groaned in response to the sharp points of pain.

"Of course," Hannibal said. "Good night, Jack." He hung up. The phone landed next to Will's head and then Hannibal put both hands on Will's hips again.

Hannibal picked up the pace, once again brutally fucking Will against the table. Will didn't even get a chance to ask what the call was about. A talented hand slipped between Will and the table, jerking him off with precision. The bite of Hannibal's zipper against his ass sent him tumbling over the edge.

Will cried and came all over the table. He nearly choked on the tie still in his mouth, desperate for big gulps of air. Hannibal finished with a low groan. His manicured nails broke skin on Will's hips.

Will arched his back, putting both feet back on the floor and tugging the tie out of his mouth. He took a moment to collect himself and stop panting. "What did Jack want?" he asked. He looked over his shoulder.

Hannibal looked perfectly put together, save for where they were still connected and a few stay strands of hair in his face. He hadn't gotten out of his suit– just undone his fly. Shame and pleasure coiled low in Will's gut.

"He asked to swing by," Hannibal mused, carefully pulling out. "He wants to discuss you."

Huffing a laugh, Will twisted around to sit on the table. Come leaked lazily out of him, and he shivered at the feeling. He watched Hannibal move to the sink to get a wet cloth to clean Will up with. "When doesn't he want to talk about me?"

"You're his favorite set of fine china," Hannibal mused. "Only brought out for the most important of guests. Valuable and fragile and equal measure."

Will snorted. He put his foot on Hannibal's hip as Hannibal carefully ran the warm cloth between Will's thighs. "I don't feel like I'm only used for important guests."

Hannibal stooped to kiss Will gently. "No?" he teased.

Leaning back on his palms, getting comfortable, Will shook his head. "I make Jack lazy. He's too quick to rely on me." Will frowned. "I feel like he stops himself from looking sometimes because he's so eager to hear what I think."

“The Guru would rather rely on you than risk his own mind,” Hannibal agreed. His lips quirked into a smile. “A shame, since your mind isn’t his to use.”

Will ran a hand through his hair. “It feels like it is, sometimes,” he admitted.

Hannibal captured Will’s hand and kissed the back of it. His amber eyes were flat. Predatory. “No,” he said quietly. “Your mind is mine, just like everything else about you.”

With a contented sigh, Will leaned against his shoulder. “Maybe I should quit, after all,” he said. “Today was…”

“Trying,” Hannibal agreed gently.

Will nodded. “What if it was the killer instead of Freddie?” he asked quietly. Will remembered the desperate fear that choked him before he saw the red riot of her hair. He *hated* that helplessness.

“I would have killed someone in front of dear Uncle Jack,” Hannibal mused.

Will elbowed him lightly. “I’m serious, Han.”

“I know, darling. I will not stop you, if you decide to quit,” Hannibal promised. He kissed the top of Will’s head. Gentle. Caring. (Owning.) “Come, my love. The stew should be ready.”

Will allowed Hannibal to pull him off the table and fix Will’s pants. Will put his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders. All the while, Will stared at the little skull smiling on the shelf by the stairs. There was a new bouquet of flowers next to her jaw. Probably Florence’s doing.

“Do you miss her?” Will asked.

Hannibal was confused for all of two seconds before he followed Will’s gaze to the child’s skull. “You know I do,” Hannibal murmured. Sorrow, deep and vast, was in his eyes. The sort of sorrow that’d follow him into his dreams. It dogged his heels and nipped the place of Hannibal’s mind where he would feel guilt (if he could).

Will hugged Hannibal. “The anniversary is soon,” he murmured. The dead of winter– there was always snow on the ground. A chill seemed to settle around Hannibal in the cold season. Every fireplace in the house would burn brightly.

Hannibal’s hand tightened on Will’s hip. “Yes,” he agreed.

Will kissed his husband, drawing the older man’s focus away from her remains. “We’ll do something special this year. With the kids.” He smiled softly. “Max needs to meet her.”

Hannibal’s gaze softened. “I would like that very much,” he murmured. He bent to kiss Will again. The gratitude flooded Will like sweet wine. Cloying. Nearly unbearable.

Just like her death.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are, as always, literally the highlight of posting!
Next chapter should be up very soon. :D

Jack and Hannibal

Chapter Summary

Happy Sunday, everyone!
This chapter is a little short.
I wanted to add a lot more, but the second half of this chapter ended up being so long that I split it in two. Unfortunately, the first half is a lot shorter than the second, but it was this or a 25k chapter, lol. So here we are.
Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal opened the door for Jack with a steady smile. “Jack,” he greeted politely. “Please, let me take your coat.”

Jack did, albeit with considerable tension in his shoulders. He handed Hannibal his thick hat and said, “Thank you for seeing me at such short notice, Dr. Lecter.”

“It is no trouble at all,” Hannibal assured him. He led the way to his study, where a fire blazed despite it only being September, and motioned to the twin chairs in front of it. Hannibal watched Jack sit, and watched the larger man consider if it *was* Will’s chair. Hannibal wondered how many of the small details Jack would catch. Will’s small touches were everywhere in their home. The decorative lure hanging from the lamp on Hannibal’s desk. The painting of a fish between two bookshelves. The dog bed in the corner.

“Would you like some wine? Whiskey, perhaps?”

“A whiskey would be great,” Jack said. He shifted to follow Hannibal with his gaze. He probably wondered if the whiskey belonged to Will. It did, of course. Hannibal much preferred wines and craft beers to hard liquors.

Hannibal passed Jack the tumbler and joined him in front of the fire. He held his glass of wine delicately. He stared at Jack with a smile and waited.

It took fifteen seconds for him to break. Jack swung back a large gulp of whiskey (it was almost rude) and pointed at Hannibal. “Do you think I’m an idiot, Dr. Lecter?” he demanded.

Hannibal blinked.

Yes, he thought. “No,” he said. He assessed Jack quietly. Rumpled. Stressed. An edge of sorrow in his eyes– the fear of knowing that something was wrong with his wife, but not knowing what. Hannibal briefly entertained the idea of telling Jack that Bella had lung

cancer, but decided against it. He certainly wouldn't benefit from Jack being in good shape. The man could wither away, and Hannibal would delight it watching him rot. "May I ask what brought this on?"

"I read Will's personnel file," Jack said. He scowled.

"Ah," Hannibal said.

Jack's scowl evolved into a glare. "Yes, *ah* ," he agreed sourly. "Did you honestly think that I wouldn't find out?"

"I didn't know you weren't aware," Hannibal replied good-naturedly. "I believe that the first time we spoke I informed you I would be unable to give Will any evaluation, as we know one another personally. I agreed to help consult on the case, and to keep an eye on Will, yes, but certainly not in any official capacity."

Jack wasn't appeased. "You forgot to mention that you're *married* . Still–you made me believe that you would help him stay focused– stay upright in the saddle!"

"Will and I have been married for fourteen years," Hannibal replied happily, delighting in the naked shock on Jack's face. "I don't believe there's anyone better suited than I to ensure that Will remains stable."

Jack sagged in his seat. Silently, he drained the rest of his glass. "Fourteen years is a long time," he mumbled.

Hannibal wistfully replied, "It does not feel like it has been that long. I can imagine the day that we met as though it was yesterday. I'll never forget the sight of Will, glaring at me, soaked from head to foot."

Jack asked, "What happened?" Curious, in spite of his anger.

"Oh, I startled him and he took a dive into the Arno River," Hannibal mused. "He hated me. Loathing at first sight." Hannibal chuckled. "We returned to my home for dry clothes, and I charmed him over dinner."

Jack smiled, but it was tense. It didn't reach his eyes. "And the children?" he prompted.

"Will and I spent a month together," Hannibal replied. "He was simply in Florence on vacation. After he returned home, our desire to be together and have a family was so potent we wished for the twins. A world apart. Together." Hannibal smiled. Just thinking about Will appearing on his doorstep, flight-frazzled and scared, warmed him to his toes. "Florence and Arno were our first children. Maximilian came to us just a few weeks ago."

Jack looked into his empty glass like it held the answers to the universe. He hesitated, glancing up at Hannibal. He wanted to ask something he shouldn't. Hannibal braced himself to keep his face neutral. "He's good with them? Will– with the children?" Jack questioned. The doubt practically oozed from his words.

“Of course,” Hannibal replied with a placating smile. “Will is a wonderful father, and an excellent husband. He dotes on our children.” A wider smile. “And on me, I suppose.”

Jack shifted, uncomfortable. “But Will is…” he trailed off, at a loss for words. He shrugged in a *you know* gesture.

Hannibal most certainly did know. Will was perfection. An angel that descended from the heavens to bask in Hannibal’s violence. A botticelli painting, free of the canvas. A renaissance statue come to life.

Hannibal sipped his wine and considered his words. “Will does not like the work he does for you,” Hannibal said eventually.

Jack’s brows reunited in the middle of his forehead. “If he had a problem with it, he would tell me no.” Jack huffed. “He certainly doesn’t have a problem telling me he won’t travel for cases.”

“Will consults with you because a part of him believes that he has to. He knows that he is an asset, and that without his help, many killers would take more lives. Do not mistake his drive to do what he feels is *right* with any manner of like for the job,” Hannibal said firmly. “Will is left drained by the work he does for the FBI. He has confessed to me, privately, that he often regrets taking on the work at all.”

“He does good work,” Jack defended immediately.

Hannibal raised a shoulder. “Perhaps, but that does not mean I wouldn’t prefer my husband at home or in the safety of his classroom.”

Jack circled back to glaring. “If you aren’t going to help Will stay focused on the *good* work he does, then I don’t need your assistance anymore, Dr. Lecter.”

“I will do my very best to keep Will stable and happy, as is my duty as his spouse,” Hannibal replied evenly. “The choice of which cases he helps with and when is entirely up to him. He knows that. Even if you decide to revoke my status as a consultant, that does not mean Will’s caseload will change.”

Relaxing just a hair, Jack asked, “So you aren’t going to stop Will from helping?”

Hannibal raised a brow. *So rude* . “I can’t stop my darling Will from doing anything he puts his mind to. I may not be fond of the strain Will’s work with the FBI puts on his shoulders, but that does not mean I can bar him from it. Will is a grown man. He is more than capable of making his own decisions.”

Jack, to his credit, looked mildly chagrined. “I didn’t mean to imply that he didn’t,” Jack said quickly, “just that I would appreciate it if you would help me keep Will on track. He does good work. Important work, Doctor. I need him, with me, in the field.”

“I will assist Will in heading to the destination that is most beneficial to his physical health and mental well-being,” Hannibal clipped firmly. “That is all. I told you I would assist in

consulting because I believe it would be beneficial to Will. Nothing else."

Jack frowned at him. "I need Will."

"No," Hannibal shot back, "I need Will. Our *children* need their father. Will is helpful to you, but his place will always be at home, with us." Hannibal let his ire show a bit in the purse of his lips.

Jack's fists clenched. "I'm not taking him away from you," he bit.

"Aren't you?" Hannibal countered. "I heard about how hard you pushed him to join you in Minnesota. He would have missed our daughter's cello recital, had he left with you."

"Eight missing girls is far more important than cello, Dr. Lecter!" Jack protested, voice rising with his frustration.

"I disagree," Hannibal said coldly. "Our children will not stay young forever. Will's absence would be detrimental to their growth and development. They love their father, and he loves them."

"He won't love them any less if he takes on more cases!" Jack argued. "They'll understand– they're bright kids. Will's work saves lives!"

"I'm not concerned about any lives but those of my husband and my children," Hannibal said. He kept his voice calm, refusing to reach the same emotional level as Jack. Hannibal frowned, allowing himself to appear put-out. "Frankly, Jack, it's outrageous that you're asking Will to give up *fatherhood* to hunt down killers that you are more than capable of arresting yourself."

"I'm not asking him to give anything up. I just need his *priorities* to be in the right place, Dr. Lecter," Jack spat back.

Hannibal's lip twitched. He wanted to rise out of his seat and dash Jack's head against the stone of the fireplace. Did he think Hannibal a fool? Jack must truly be used to getting his way. Unfortunately for him, an appeal to Hannibal's perceived morals would always fall short.

The scent of coffee, river, soap, and dog drifted in from the hallway. Hannibal glanced up from Jack to watch Will pad into the room. His darling looked edible. Freshly showered, with pink cheeks and damp curls. A vision. His feet were bare, his body draped only in one of Hannibal's dressing gowns, the soft silk embroidered with a golden *HL* above his breast. His wedding ring glinted in the light of the fireplace. Hannibal must paint him like this, once Will was free of his cast.

Jack, startled by Will's sudden appearance, shot to his feet. "Will," he said. He looked guilty. Hannibal resisted the urge to scoff. His darling obviously knew about Jack's visit. Hannibal didn't keep secrets from his husband.

“Hello, mylimasis,” Hannibal greeted. He stood in one smooth movement, discarding his glass on the side table. He strode to the doorway, bending to press a chaste kiss to Will’s lips.

Will leaned into Hannibal’s shoulder. “Hey, Jack,” he said casually.

Jack swallowed. “I was just catching up with Dr. Lecter.”

“I know,” Will replied. He shifted, looking back up at Hannibal. Hannibal watched as the version of Will in front of him shifted before his very eyes. This wasn’t working Will– the Will that was stern and unfriendly, with no sense of humor. No, this was Hannibal’s husband. The demure William Lecter who simpered at Hannibal during dinner parties and loved being dolled up in lace. This was the Will who tore apart the Haddocks with a handful of carefully placed razors, each delivered with a petal-soft smile.

“I’m sorry for interrupting,” he said softly. One of his hands skated up Hannibal’s chest. A light, casual claim. Will looked chastised, glancing down at their feet. Jack, meanwhile, looked gobsmacked.

“Is something wrong, darling?” Hannibal asked. He cupped Will’s face, making his husband raise his chin to meet his gaze.

Will’s smile got sadder. “Max’s fever spiked again. Will you come make sure he’s okay?” Will asked softly. “I know you’re talking with Jack, but I’m worried.” A lie, of course. Hannibal didn’t want to be stuck with Jack any longer than he had to, and Will (who’d been in the hallway listening the whole time) decided to put an end to the conversation. Hannibal wouldn’t argue with that. Jack would likely just talk Hannibal in circles. Jack Crawford was notoriously bullish in that regard. He’d repeat himself and get louder until he got what he wanted.

“Of course,” Hannibal soothed. He kissed the inside of Will’s wrist. “I’ll be right up.”

Will nodded. “Have a good night,” he murmured in Jack’s general direction. Will slipped from the room, as quietly as he came.

Hannibal smoothed the front of his suit. “I apologize, Jack. It seems we’ll have to cut our talk short.”

Jack shook his head. “Not at all, Dr. Lecter. I understand. Your children come first.”

Hannibal led the way to the door, holding out Jack’s coat for the other man to slip into. He returned the agent’s hat, and gave him a smile. “Have a good evening,” he said.

Jack hesitated on the stoop. He licked his lips. “Is he always like that?”

“Will?” Hannibal questioned lightly. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

The agent’s eyes ticked over Hannibal’s shoulder. “He seemed calmer than normal.”

“Of course,” Hannibal agreed. “Will builds forts and walls to protect himself from the killers he slips into. They haunt his steps; dog at his heels and beg for his attention. Those

defenses aren't necessary here. He has nothing to hide from. Here, in our home, he can be authentically himself."

Another lie. Will was an ever-changing, ever shifting enigma. The nature of his empathy rarely allowed him to be purely himself. He would be forever stained by Hannibal; not reduced to a collection of influences–but always colored by Hannibal and the children's adoration. Will's mind strove to please his family. It urged him to submit to the monster in Hannibal, even as he held its leash.

The suit Jack saw tonight was one of deadly charm and quiet appeasement. The suit he donned in public when showcasing to whom he belonged. Another facet of Hannibal's charming beloved. Will's true self was somewhere between his suits. Not quite the prickly teacher, not completely the submissive husband, but not the cold, calculating killer that smashed a marble statue against Miriam Lass's head with a detached look in his eyes, either.

Will was all of them and more, but none of them, all at once. Will Graham was twisting shadows in the candlelight, thrown against the walls at the whim of the flame in the breeze. He shifted faces, masks, with ease. He *saw* between the masks of others, and pried between clay and flesh until blood stained his fingers.

Hannibal could not hide from Will.

Hannibal loved him all the more for it.

Jack's gaze drifted to the window next to the door. Hannibal wondered where the guilt on his face stemmed from. Perhaps he realized that Will wasn't quite as broken as he seemed. Perhaps Jack knew, all along, that he shouldn't misuse Will, but the realization of Will's children finally made him see Will as a man and not a hammer to beat down Jack's prey. Maybe Jack regretted knowing nothing about the man he claimed to be considerate of. Jack may not feel any of that, perhaps he simply regretted not making Hannibal see Will as Jack did: something to be used until shattered.

"Oh," he said eventually. Jack mustered a weak smile. "Well, thank you again for meeting with me. Goodnight, Dr. Lecter."

"Goodnight, Jack," Hannibal returned. He closed the door and locked it, letting his feet guide him through the quiet house. He turned off the lights as he went, happy to return to the place where he belonged.

Will waited by the crib, a finger curled in Max's fingers. When he looked up, Hannibal saw sharks swimming in the dark blue seas that met his gaze. Violent and hungry. A sort of savagery that left Hannibal hungry.

"What are you thinking, mylimasis?" Hannibal murmured.

Will smiled. All teeth. "I don't like Jack here, in our home," he murmured. "You won't invite him inside again."

Hannibal kissed the back of Will's hand. "Of course, darling. Whatever you want."

Will’s head tipped to the side, predatory. Hannibal recognized the Ripper in Will’s stare. Himself, swelling Will’s anger into violent, killer waves. “Maybe it’s time we gave him something else to think about,” Will said.

Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will’s lips. Adoring. “He was dreadfully rude tonight,” he agreed lowly. “He thinks of you as a child without autonomy. Something needing to be coddled and guided.”

“He’d understand, if he could see my design,” Will murmured.

Excitement balled in Hannibal’s stomach. The sort of perverse joy that bubbled over as people trashed on his table. As pigs screamed for mercy. As the acceptance of their death killed the light in their eyes. “What do you have in mind?” Hannibal murmured.

Chapter End Notes

If you've made it this far, I'd love to hear what you think!
I'm not totally happy with this chapter, but I'm done beating my head against it, lol.
See you all next week! <3

The Opera - Florence

Chapter Summary

Happy weekend! ~
Please note: Flo is a lil creep.
I know this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Florence did a twirl in front of her floor-length mirror. She looked beautiful. Papa finally caved and allowed her the asymmetric hem that she wanted. Her dress was a deep, royal blue, and fell to her ankles. There was a fun amount of poof to it, but not so much that she looked childlike. It was comfortable, soft, and so, *so* pretty. Dad helped her do her hair, pinning her short bangs with a beautiful butterfly clip. It matched Papa's tiepin.

Florence skipped down the stairs, delighted to see her family. Papa wore a flamboyant royal blue suit, while Dad's was a classic black with a shirt that matched Papa's exterior. Arno wore black slacks and a comfortable shirt that matched the rest of them. Max was sleeping, curled up in Dad's arms. His onesie was the same blue, covered in flowers and butterflies.

Dad smiled, his blue eyes crinkling. "You look beautiful," he complimented.

"Thank you. You look handsome," Florence replied.

Papa took her hand and made her do a little twirl. "I must admit, it appears I was wrong about the hem. You look regal, mažoji."

Florence giggled. "I *told* you, Papa."

Papa dropped a kiss on her forehead before turning and fussing over Arno's hair. Arno always looked like Papa when the older man slicked his blond hair back. Everyone knew how much Papa *liked* that, so Arno let him fix invisible strands, arranging his hair *just so*.

Once satisfied, Papa held out an arm for Dad to escort him to the car. Happiness bubbled in Florence's stomach. She loved love and watching her parents so happy together really made her whole day. Especially after watching them fight all those years ago.

Recently, Florence caught the sounds of Dad crying at night, whimpering for more. Normal children would likely be bothered by the sounds of their parents having sex, but Florence just laughed and told her brother, "*Maybe I'll get a sister this time*." Arno just

snorted and turned on the white-noise machine by the door. They were happy their parents were happy.

Her parents weren't as sneaky as they thought they were. Vanishing into the basement or hiding out in dad's work shed. Florence saw the flush to their cheeks and the mess to their hair. Plus, the blood under Papa's nails and the new marks high on Dad's neck were a dead giveaway.

Florence gently ran her nails down the front of her silky dress. Someday, she'd have someone like that of her own. Someone to help her appear normal, like Dad did for Papa. Florence loved love. Just the thought of it made her smile.

Papa said that she would have to be patient. Fate worked in mysterious ways, and it would likely be years before she found a soulmate of her own. But she could be patient. Florence would make Papa proud. She wouldn't complain about the wait. Not even once. And then she would bring home her own spouse one day and introduce them to her parents and they would be so proud of her for finding someone so *perfect*.

For the time being, Florence decided to focus on the opera and enjoying the night out with her family. She didn't like crowds, so she stayed between Papa and Dad. Arno stood on Dad's other side. He didn't like crowds either, but not because they made him nervous. Arno had Papa's strong nose. He couldn't stand the mix of perfume and sweat.

Florence let Papa escort him into the opera house on his arm, delighting as heads turned their way. Not because she liked the attention, but because between Papa openly preening, and Dad's thinly-veiled amusement, Florence felt safe and happy. They deserved this. To be seen, together, for what they were: superior to all these boring adults.

The Barber of Seville was one of Dad's favorite operas. Papa preferred the over-the-top dramatic ones. Especially if they involved murder or if everyone died tragically. *The Barber of Seville* had upbeat songs that Papa enjoyed, but none of the melodrama and angsty deaths that made Dad roll his eyes. A good middle-ground for their first opera in Baltimore. Likely precisely while Papa chose it.

Papa did not stop to speak with his acquaintances before the opera, preferring to usher them straight to their booth for the first half of the show. Florence enjoyed the music and the vibrant costumes from the quiet of their private box. Even Arno perked up to listen, clearly impressed with the music.

Evidently, Papa did not, because the first thing out of his mouth as the curtain for intermission fell was, "Truly, that trombone player leaves much to be desired."

"I only heard one mistake," Arno said.

Papa shook his head. "The transitions were much too loud, mažasis. The focus should be on the piccolo and flutes during the initial swell of the chorus. Not brass instruments. I shall point out any errors during the second half."

Dad chuckled. "Or you could let him enjoy the show."

“Developing a keen ear is important to any musician,” Papa said, face pinched.

“Yes, and Arno has the rest of his life to concentrate on developing freaky ears like yours, hon,” Dad said drily. “Let’s just get through tonight, okay?”

Chuckling, Papa kissed the frown off Dad’s face. “Yes, mylimasis,” he agreed evenly.

Dad rolled his eyes and adjusted Max. “Come on. Let’s go be social with the piranhas before I lose my patience.”

Florence slipped between her parents again, happy to let her fathers do all of the talking. They were *immediately* accosted by an older woman in a golden, low cut dress. Judging by the look on Papa’s face, he rather liked her, despite her gaudy accessories.

“Dr. Lecter!” she greeted warmly. “It has been too long, my dear!”

“Miss Komeda,” Papa returned. “It has.”

Komeda smiled, leaning in to squeeze his biceps and kiss his cheeks. Dad’s jaw twitched, but he kept his eyes low and his stance relaxed. Her sharp gaze flickered over to Dad first, and then to Florence and her siblings. She hid it well, but Florence could practically smell her curiosity. “And who is this?” she cooed, zeroing in on Max.

“Our youngest,” Papa said proudly, “Maximillian.”

Komeda cooed again. “He is just *darling*.” She refocused on Dad, offering her skinny hand to shake. “You must be Dr. Lecter’s husband. I am Francis Komeda. It is a delight to meet you at last.”

Dad didn’t shake her hand, but laughed warmly. “I apologize, I’ve got my hands full here. I’m Will.”

The lady didn’t seem offended, taking it in stride and smiling even wider. “It is just *so* wonderful to meet you, Will!” she said brightly. She looked between Florence and Arno, hungry for information. Gossip. “And who are you?” she asked Florence.

Florence blinked at her. She addressed Florence directly instead of her parents. Begrudgingly, she understood why Papa liked her. “I’m Florence,” she said quietly.

“I’m Arno,” Arno added from next to Dad.

“Charmed,” Komeda said. She refocused on Papa, asking, “Where have you been hiding this delightful little family of yours, Dr. Lecter?”

“My children are very busy,” Papa said smoothly, “and there is only so much time in the day.” Papa’s eyes softened, gazing upon his children. “They are at that age, where high school is everything. It would be remiss of me to bring them out late on a school night. They have much studying to do.”

Komeda nodded empathetically. “I understand. Why, at that age, I was so focused on being the next Mary Shelley that I never got out with my parents!”

“I’ve read some of your work,” Dad said, his smile warming up. “Your murder scenes are always so vivid. I can picture them.”

Komeda beamed. “Thank you!” she replied. “Mother never did believe I would have a knack for horror, but then, she also thought I was into boys!”

All the adults laughed. Florence didn’t think it was *that* funny. But adults were like that when they got all circled up. Laughing at weird things and smiling even though they were unhappy.

“Oh, you must come to the opera again,” Komeda said. “I can see why Dr. Lecter keeps you hidden away. You are just a treasure.”

Dad smiled in a muted sort of way. Humoring her. He said, “We’re having a good time. Perhaps we’ll come out more often.”

Komeda clapped her hands and began to gush about the symphony board work that Papa did. She wanted Dad to come to every performance. Dad immediately begged off, citing a new baby and work.

Florence didn’t care about any of that. She let her eyes wander, content to lean into Papa’s side and study the crowd. A short, fat man focused on Papa with wet eyes. He practically begged Papa to just look his way– just for a moment! Papa, obviously seeing him, aggressively did not glance up from his conversation partners to humor the little man’s obsession.

The man next to him was far more interesting, with dark eyes and a fake face. He looked like Papa did at home, sometimes. A predator out in the open. A killer without a mask. Absently, Florence wondered if he’d killed yet, or if he would soon. Judging from the way he looked at Papa, he must be feeling a pang of his friend’s undisguised *want*.

Florence almost felt sorry for the both of them. Dad didn’t share.

Maybe their interference would be enough to make Dad let Papa make art again. Florence missed watching her Papa work, folding viscera and flowers into the most beautiful bouquets. His art made her so, so happy.

The little wanters didn’t move closer, stuck on the sidelines as Papa introduced his family to everyone who came near. Florence grew bored of them quickly, letting her eyes dance further and further away.

Until she found eyes that looked back.

Florence almost didn’t recognize her.

Usually, Stacey was all poise and aggression. The cheerleader stereotype to a comical degree. She wore her hair back in a high ponytail, and always grinned at Florence when

acting like a bitch. Stacey looked like a ghost of herself, curled into her chiffon dress with her head hunched and hair framing her face. Florence squinted. She couldn't be sure, but it looked like the other girl had makeup on her face. She didn't usually wear much. Either that, or she was so pale her pallor changed entirely since they last saw one another.

Tucked into the corner, behind her agitated parents, Stacey looked quickly away when Florence caught her staring.

It took Florence a moment to place the look on her face– *fear*– and the responding coil of emotion in her own gut– *pleasure*.

Stacey deserved to be afraid.

Florence tracked the other girl with her eyes as she scurried away from the finely dressed crowd towards the bathrooms. With a quick excuse to her parents in quiet Italian, Florence followed. Arno shot her a look, but at her headshake, stayed put.

The lights dimmed, signaling the return to their seats. Florence braved the thinning crowd, chasing her prey. She wanted to see more of it. Stacey's hurt. It would make her feel better about her short hair and her ugly scar.

Stacey waited for her in a dark alcove across from the bathrooms. She glared at Florence, her fury renewed, anger knitting between her brows. "Are you following me now, freak?" she hissed as Florence drew near.

Florence smiled, hoping she looked as calm and collected as Papa did. "You looked upset. I wanted to see if you were okay," Florence lied.

Stacey scoffed. "*Please.* We're enemies. That's *not* what you're doing." Tears gathered in her dark green eyes. "You came over here to brag, didn't you?" Stacey stepped Florence's way, her shoulders square and her jaw set. "Well you don't need to, okay? I fucking got in trouble thanks to you. Snitch."

"Snitch?" Florence echoed.

"Yeah," Stacey agreed testily. "Because you gave your fucking daddy all those texts *I'm* on probation at school! They kicked me off the squad!" A few tears dripped down to her chin, where they clung to the makeup dusting her cheeks.

Oh, right. The texts. She forgot about that. Giving them to Papa was Arno's idea. Florence frowned. The foundation Stacey wore was thick and oily. Not the sort of thing Stacey usually chose for herself.

And… *there*.

Near her jaw. A patch of darkness.

Something dark bubbled in Florence's stomach. A bubble that grew bigger and bigger at the base of her skull; ready to burst. A need to *see.*

Florence took Stacey's hand and dragged her into one of the unisex bathrooms. The other girl squaked in protest, but she was shorter than Florence, and couldn't compete with her physical strength.

"Show me," Florence ordered.

Rubbing her wrist with a scowl, Stacey demanded, "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"The bruises," Florence clarified, making Stacey freeze. "Let me see them."

Stacey teared up again. "I don't know what you're talking about," she muttered. She hugged her middle, making Florence curious. Did she have some there, too?

Florence moved forward, not caring for the other girl's protest, and thumbed some of the makeup off her chin. Stacey hissed in pain and protest as a *beautiful* flower of purple skin became apparent. Turning green around the edges already, but delightfully dark in the middle.

"What are you doing?" Stacey whispered. Her voice was small now. Meek.

"It's pretty," Florence whispered. She rubbed more makeup off the other girl's chin. The bruise hooked up her chin toward her ear. She must have gotten punched in the jaw.

"You're a freak," Stacey muttered.

Florence hummed in agreement. The mark was beautiful. Proof of blood, flowing and bursting. Proof of life. Proof of pain. Florence couldn't help herself. She pressed her thumb a little harder into the pretty purple mark. She didn't register Stacey's shock until the other girl violently shoved her away.

"Stop it!" Stacey shouted. Tears dripped down her cheeks. "Are you *making fun* of me?" she demanded.

Florence shook her head. She met the other girl's gaze and held it. "You're beautiful," she murmured.

Stacey sucked in a sharp breath. She looked at her feet, brown hair cascading over her shoulders in a shiny waterfall. "You don't mean that," she murmured.

"I do," Florence said.

Hugging herself, Stacey said, "They're ugly. *I'm* ugly."

Florence quickly shook her head. She closed the distance between them, and held the other girl's hands. "I think they're lovely. Like flowers blooming on your skin."

Stacey laughed wetly. "You're so fucking weird."

"Who left them?" Florence asked.

Stacey went rigid, her face paling. Fear flashed through her eyes.

And, unlike earlier, Florence *hated* it.

Fear for someone else. Fear of something else. Florence scowled, struggling to name the wiggling feeling in her ribs. She liked seeing Stacey scared. Vulnerable. Why didn't she like it *now*? It didn't make any sense. She would have to ask Papa. He understood emotions better than she did.

Voice stilted, Stacey confessed, "My mom."

Florence blinked at her. Right. The parents who didn't want her. Florence knew about them. She used them against Stacey when the other girl was being particularly bitchy. She didn't think Stacey was physically abused, though. Just emotionally neglected.

Dad's words thrummed through her head. He'd been above a pedophile– one who abused his own children– and he'd said, "*People who hurt their children don't deserve them.*" He patted the man's face condescendingly and said, "*I can't take them away from you, so I'll keep you away from them."* Dad enjoyed that kill as much as Papa, humming along to Papa's music in the background.

"I can help you," Florence said firmly.

Stacey's eyes went wide. "What?"

"I can," Florence insisted. "My Dad hates abusers, he'll–"

"No!" Stacey interrupted. That fear was back, sharper this time. "You can't tell anyone. I'll get in trouble." She reached for Florence for the first time, her pretty lavender nails digging into Florence's arm. Florence studied the way her own skin whitened under the pressure of the other girl's grip.

She liked it.

Florence nodded slowly. "Then I'll help. Without my fathers."

"How?" Stacey asked doubtfully.

"I don't know yet, but I'll think of something," Florence promised.

Stacey searched her gaze, face still wet with tears. "Why would you help me?" she whispered.

Florence shrugged. "You're pretty."

Stacey frowned. "Are you, like, a lesbian or something?" she asked nervously. She drew her hands away from Florence. Florence wanted them back, digging in, maybe breaking skin next time.

"I don't think so," Florence replied. She honestly didn't give sex much thought. She had other things to worry about– music and her family. Dance. Cooking. A dozen things she'd rather be doing. She squinted at the ceiling.

But, she'd also never felt this need to *see* before.

Excitement burst bright.

Florence wanted to see more emotions on Stacey's face. The pain. The bruises. The tears and the fear and the desperate, quiet hope. Florence knew herself well enough to recognize a burgeoning hyper-fixation. Maybe it would be a passing fancy, but maybe not. Maybe Stacey would be to Florence what Dad was to Papa! Maybe this girl would be her wife someday. Florence bit her lip.

Maybe.

It was unlikely.

Stacey was mean. A fighter. She didn't particularly like Florence, either.

Florence always had fun with Stacey's poor attempts at bullying, before the hair incident. She liked hurting Stacey's feelings when Stacey lashed out. It was part of the excitement. But this was different. Darker. Maybe this was how Papa felt.

Florence couldn't wait to find out.

Maybe this was how love started for her. Dad hated Papa right away, too. They fought violently on the shore of the Arno– trying to kill each other. Stacey couldn't kill Florence, but maybe the bullying had been the first steps of *their* love story.

Mind made up, to explore and *look* longer, Florence took Stacey's hand again. Gentle. Assuming that harmless, helpful guise that Papa wore with teachers, and she said, "I promise. I won't tell anyone. I'm going to help you."

Stacey teared up again. Something in her broke. A desperate prayer, finally answered. Stacey was empty– no love. No happiness. But Florence still touched her gently. With care. Stacey collapsed into Florence's arms and wailed. Florence held her tight, happy to hold her through her sobs. Stacey smelled like shampoo and caramel and pointed sorrow.

Florence enjoyed the symphony of new emotions thrumming through her until there was a knock on the door sometime later.

A man's voice asked, "Is everything alright in there?"

"We're fine!" Florence called.

Stacey rubbed her eyes. "Fuck, sorry. I didn't mean to do that." She pushed away, standing. She tried to gather herself. It wasn't working.

"It's fine," Florence soothed.

Stacey went to the mirror and started trying to fix her makeup. It didn't do much but smudge the thick concealer further. She huffed in frustration. She turned back to Florence,

not meeting her gaze at all now. “I should get back to my seat before Mom comes looking for me.”

Florence nodded. “Okay,” she said.

Dad always said that you couldn’t approach spooked or upset animals quickly. You could only offer comfort as they came to you. Soothe them when the opportunity presented itself, but not sooner. Otherwise, they would run away.

To her annoyance, the dark-skinned man with the dead eyes waited politely for them outside the bathroom. Stacey ducked her head in embarrassment. “Everything alright?” he asked. It took him a moment too long to smile. The movement in his cheeks a little too forced. His mask was poorly constructed.

“We’re fine,” Florence said, assuming a heavier accent than normal, “but thank you for your concern.”

The man smiled. “I think I saw you earlier. With Dr. Lecter. Is he your father?”

Hair stood up on the back of Florence’s neck.

Danger.

He was an adult. Bigger, stronger, faster.

Florence didn’t have any weapons. She couldn’t fight or flee.

Florence tightened her grip on Stacey’s hand. She didn’t want this man to hurt Stacey, either. A more callous Florence may have abandoned her and booked it for her fathers, but *this* Florence wanted to drag Stacey with her.

“Yes,” Florence replied evenly. “Why?”

The man’s smile got wider. Worse. Stacey leaned away from him, picking up on his bad intentions in that way that all women just could. “I have a friend who is very fond of your father. I will admit, I wasn’t particularly invested, but what I saw today piqued my interest. Your father has very interesting eyes.”

Florence pursed her lips. “My fathers are very much in love. Neither of them would appreciate a comment like that, *signore*.”

“What’s interesting is that nobody knew he even had children before today,” the man continued on, ignoring Florence. His dark eyes went to her forehead. His voice dropped low. Conspiratorial. “It makes me wonder what he’s hiding about you.”

Florence wanted to curl her lip and stab the man. She wanted to pummel him into a paste. Her heart beat wildly in her chest. Most mortifying of all, Florence felt the beginnings of a panic attack coming on. His eyes were the same as *his*, when he’d taken the knife and–

“What the hell are you doing?” Dad demanded.

All three of them were startled. The man took several steps back as Dad cut between them. Fury laced his blue eyes, and his hands were clenched into fists at his side. The mask he wore by Papa's side was long gone, replaced with a brilliant veil of violence and righteous anger.

"I heard crying–" the man began.

"Bull-fucking-shit," Dad interrupted. "You're obviously harassing these girls." He took a step toward the man, who took another immediate step back. "I don't know who the hell you are, but you're going to go away, *right now,* or I will get rid of you myself."

With a pinched frown, the man said, "This is quite a surprise, Mr. Lecter. I was under the impression that you were rather shy."

"It's *Dr. Graham*," Dad snapped coldly. "If you have any of impressions of me at all, they were made quickly, through that broken window of yours. I wouldn't rely on them, if I were you."

"Excuse me?" the man defended.

"I can see it in your eyes," Dad sneered. "They *are* the windows to the soul." Dad barked a cruel laugh. "Or, I suppose in your case, the lack thereof." The man flinched. Dad closed the distance between them, glaring at the man from a breath away. "I see it. Crawling around inside your head. That pitiful part of you that you're hiding. You never could live up to all those expectations, could you? No, you couldn't be a maestro. You had to settle into a workshop. Doing the *grunt work*, because you'd never make it as one of the greats."

Florence watched as her father's shoulders squared themselves, and he adjusted his feet to mirror the man's pose. "None of your work ever will. You'll always be in the shadow of a person more talented, more *passionate*. This pathetic attempt to get my husband's attention didn't go unnoticed." Dad, turning away, promised, "You won't like his response."

"You're being rather rude," the man said stiffly.

"You're a fucking creep," Dad countered. "You don't deserve manners." Dismissing the man, Dad said, "Come on, you two. We're missing the show."

Florence held Stacey's hand tight, leading her back to their private booth. She didn't even fight it. She didn't try to slink off to her parents. Maybe the prey in her recognized the predator in Dad. Maybe she understood that he was safe. Stacey's hands shook.

Florence cast a look over her shoulder at the man before they rounded the corner. His expression was open. His mouth parted into a soft 'O'. Florence huffed. All Dad did was shift the attention away from Papa and onto himself.

That was fine with Florence.

She didn't like gnats buzzing around her family, and Papa was much quicker to get out the fly-swatter than Dad.

They stepped back into the quiet of the booth, and Dad startled her when he cupped Stacey's face. The other girl jumped, the opera stifling her noise of surprise. Dad looked down at her, eyes terribly sad. He touched her chin. "Your mom," he murmured.

Papa watched curiously, rising from his seat as Stacey crumpled to the floor, right there in the booth. She buried her face in Florence's shoulder and cried. Florence held her, happy to watch Stacey completely fall apart.

Papa caught her eye, curiosity alight on his features.

Dad looked at Stacey like she was one of his strays. Something small and vulnerable. Something to be taken care of. Saved. *Leashed* .

Florence put on her sweetest face, turned to her Dad, and asked in soft Italian, "*Can I keep her? Please?*"

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this peek into Florence's mind! She won't be the primary narrator at any point, but you'll see another chapter or two from her perspective. Next up is the opera's after-party, and everyone's favorite patient that just can't wait to get Hannibal's attention!

Comments make my life! ~~~

The Opera - Will

Chapter Summary

Hey! I'm alive-ish! :)
Happy weekend!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Can I keep her? Please?"* Florence whispered, her amber eyes wide and imploring.

Will resisted the urge to sigh and pinch his brow. He shook his head, and stroked his hand down Florence's back. "*We can't keep people,"* he replied softly. "*They aren't pets, darling. If you try to do that– keep her all wound up and control everything she does– she will only disappoint you.*"

Florence frowned. She looked at the girl sobbing into her pretty blue dress. Florence looked conflicted. "*But Papa kept you*," she argued.

Will winced. He knew how it looked from the outside. Hannibal was the one with the money and influence. Since so much of Will's control regarded their secret hobbies, an outsider looking in would assume that Hannibal had more power. He expected better from Florence, though. She spent enough time with them to know the truth.

"*Your dad and I keep each other,*" Hannibal soothed. "*We are a partnership. Our relationship is that of equals, Florence. You are still young. As you grow, you will learn more about what you want and what you need. Dad is right.*"

Florence pouted. "*But I want to. Right now. I don't want to wait to be an adult to have her be mine.*"

"*Keep her as a friend, "* Hannibal suggested. "*Make her depend on you. Warp her sense of self until she can't imagine her life without you in it.*"

Will sighed. He put his face in his hands. Not the kind of advice one should be giving a sixteen year old with control issues, but alright. If it kept Florence from whisking Stacey to the murder basement at the end of the night, Will would deal with the fallout.

Florence nodded slowly. "*I like that. Okay*."

Arno squatted next to his sister, watching Stacey like a hawk. Keeping track of every little shake and sob, but not particularly interested. "*I don't get what you like about her*," Arno said.

"*Look,* " Florence said, thumbing at a big purple bruise on the other girl's jaw, "*it's like she's covered in flowers. It's beautiful*."

Arno leaned closer, inspecting the bruises.

Hannibal patted their son's head and stood. "Come, let us enjoy the rest of the show." He sat in his seat, holding an excited Max in his arms, and refocused on the singing. Reluctantly, Will sat next to him.

The kids stayed on the floor, hiding between their dads' legs and the wall of the booth. They couldn't be seen from the curtain that led to the hallway. Stacey calmed by the time the finale began, leaning into Florence's shoulder with a despondent look on her face. Arno sat on her other side, holding her hand. He had his eyes closed, listening to the music. Florence had her eyes on Stacey, and carefully fixed the other girl's makeup.

Will couldn't help but empathize with Stacey. The physical abuse was new– he didn't see any sign of it in her parents' eyes or weighing on her shoulders when they met in the principal's office. She looked like a shell of her former self. Her arms were skinnier, her face gaunt. She didn't sleep– *couldn't* sleep. If she slept, bad things would happen.

Will frowned.

I don't want to hurt anymore.

I just want to be loved.

Love me. Please, please, love me. Love me, loveme, LoveMe, LOVEME–

Hannibal's hand on Will's forearm drew him out of his contemplation. His husband shot him a curious look. Eager to know what insights Will gleamed. Will shook his head. Later.

Will tired to focus on the rest of the show. The poor girl's desperation gnawed at his ankles like a hungry dog. Her emotions were deep and seemingly fathomless– that sort of teenage hatred for herself and those around her that couldn't quite be emulated by a mature adult mind. The girl at his feet felt too much.

Maybe she'll be good for the twins, Will mused to himself. *They don't have enough emotions, she has too many. It'll balance them out*.

Will stood when Hannibal did. Clapping as the actors came to the edge of the stage and bowed. Even with the drama that stirred in their booth during the second half, Will enjoyed himself. The music made his chest thrum.

Hannibal buttoned his suit jacket and readjusted Max with a smile. "Shall we go socialize?" he prompted.

Will grimaced. "I want to hold the baby." He held out his hands expectantly.

Hannibal passed over Max without fuss. "Hoping to use our son as a shield so you don't have to talk about yourself, dear Will?"

“Don’t ask questions that have obvious answers,” Will clipped back.

“We’re going to stay here for a little bit,” Florence piped up. “I don’t think Stacey should be in a crowd just yet.”

Will looked at the weepy girl. “Will that be alright? Are your parents going to look for you?”

Stacey shook her head. “They’ll text me when they want to leave,” she mumbled.

Will smiled sadly at her. Poor girl. Just the mention of her parents had her spiraling. Fresh tears welled up in her eyes. Her lower lip trembled.

Hannibal surprised them all when he put a gentle hand on her shoulder. “I am a doctor, Miss Haddock. Should you ever need medical assistance, please do not be afraid to reach out. I’m sure you know where we live.”

Stacey sniffled. “Thank you,” she mumbled.

Florence beamed at Hannibal. “I love you, Papa.”

“I love you, too, darling girl,” Hannibal replied. His eyes brimmed with pride and satisfaction. Will wondered if Stacey followed through on his offer if Hannibal would treat the girl simply to see their daughter smile. Probably.

Will let himself be led out of the booth. “She’s desperate for affection,” Will commented. “If you’re not careful, she’ll latch onto you, too.”

“Would that be such a bad thing?” Hannibal asked innocently.

Will shot him a glare. “You can’t be serious. We are not encouraging our kids to keep other children as housepets. Absolutely not, Hannibal.”

“The passionate affairs I had as a teen played a large hand in forming me into the man I am now,” Hannibal replied. “It would be remiss of me to thwart Florence’s efforts to do the same. She’s young. She’ll be prone to flights of fancy.”

“Ah, yes,” Will agreed drily. “Because your affair with Lady Murasaki is really what we want for our children. Silly me.”

Hannibal frowned. “Aside from the importance of pubescent dating for her development, this is the first time she has sought out human-contact from someone who does not share her blood. This is behavior we should encourage, Will.”

Will groaned. That was a good point. Their Florence aggressively went out of her way to avoid other people. Having her interact with someone outside of their family would be a good thing– even if she thought of that person as a glorified hamster.

“Fine,” Will said. “They can be friends. If Florence starts being weird about it I’m going to make her stop.”

Hannibal laughed. “Our darling daughter would never.”

They swept into the *golden room* – a large upstairs ballroom with gold trim and an ostentatious chandelier that Will hated– just in time to be swept up by Dr. Schutcliff. He and Hannibal were residents together at John Hopkins, and he *loved* to gossip with Hannibal about both the staff and his patients.

Will leaned into Hannibal’s side, content to focus on Max and ignore the conversations around him. After the doctor came a member of the symphony board, and then the conductor for the pit orchestra.

The socialites were too polite to inquire about Will’s presence beyond customary greetings. Most assumed that he was simply a friend of Hannibal’s, and very few addressed him after Will said his name. Especially after they asked what he did. *Teacher* didn’t exactly inspire the gossip mill.

A portly woman in a bright pink dress inserted herself into the conversation quite abruptly. Judging from the flush to her cheeks and the sway of her shoulders, she was already drunk. “Dr. Lecter!” she cried. “I have been trying to get your attention all night.”

“Ms. Barnes,” Hannibal greeted politely.

Ms. Barnes turned to Will with a grin on her face. “Samantha Barnes.” She held out her hand like she expected Will to kiss the back of it despite the baby in his arms. “I don’t believe we’ve had the pleasure.”

Ah. Hannibal’s favorite weaponized gossip. Will remembered the name.

“Will,” Will replied. He shook the woman’s hand. Her eyebrow twitched.

The old gossip recovered quickly. “I don’t believe I’ve seen you around, Will. Is this your first time at the opera?”

Komeda tittered. Will saw the women’s entire relationship in a glance: ex-lovers turned bitter rivals. This was the stage where they competed for information and attention. Will smiled and watched Komeda take center stage. “Will is Dr. Lecter’s *husband*,” she declared. “Of course he’s been to the opera, Samantha.”

There were several muted gasps.

Samantha’s cheeks pinked. “Well, *I’ve* certainly never seen him here.”

“My Will is busy,” Hannibal said warmly. He smiled at Will like he hung the moon in the sky. “Unfortunately, between raising our children and his work, he scarcely has time to attend gatherings like this with me.”

“What do you do, Will?” Samantha asked curiously.

“I teach,” Will replied.

Hannibal hummed. “Simply saying that you *teach* sells you quite short, my love.”

Will shot Hannibal a warning glance.

Hannibal smiled at him. Bastard. “You see, my husband works at Quantico, teaching the FBI’s best and brightest. He’s quite the expert in his field.”

That got some *ooh*’s and *ahh*’s from their gathered audience.

“He’s brilliant,” Hannibal said proudly. “There isn’t a sharper mind in those lauded halls.”

Will smiled stiffly when Ms. Barnes cooed at him. “Fascinating!” she said. She looked smugly at Komeda. “You must tell us more about your work.”

“Do you join investigations?” a young woman asked excitedly. Will could practically smell her love of true crime.

“I consult on profiles,” Will admitted reluctantly, “but I don’t go into the field.”

“That’s so cool!” the young woman gushed. “Are you working on the Campus Cannibal case?”

Will blinked. Oh, right. Freddie went and named the killer who’d been snatching girls from school tours. And, thanks to Will, they were pretty sure he was a cannibal.

Will shrugged. “Most faculty have put in their two cents about that one.”

“It’s very scary,” Komeda said. She sighed, shaking her head. “Those poor girls. So young.”

“A tragedy,” Hannibal agreed solemnly.

“It’s pathetic that the FBI can’t catch him,” a man griped. His gaze flicked to will and he grimaced. “No offense. But it’s been months. If the news is to be believed, they don’t even have any leads.”

“No offense taken,” Will said. “I’m not on the investigating team. I’m just a teacher.”

Hannibal, despite Will’s words, rankled at his side. Any perceived insult to Will was an insult to Hannibal, and insults to Hannibal ended with people dead in buses with their tongues between bible pages.

Max gurgled. He bent his head back to stare at Will and declared, “Ba!” and then decided to wiggle as hard as a baby could possibly wiggle.

Hannibal laughed fondly. He rubbed Max’s back. “Yes, we’ve been standing still for too long, haven’t we? Excuse us, I think we should stretch our legs.”

Will and Hannibal turned. There was a short, stout man a mere foot from them. He beamed at Hannibal like he was the very answer to all of life’s questions. “Dr. Lecter!” he greeted

excitedly. His eyes shined with curiosity and ardor. Will caught him staring earlier. He foolishly hoped Hannibal's fan would keep his distance. "I knew that was you."

"Franklyn," Hannibal replied evenly.

"Oh?" Komeda asked. "An acquaintance of yours?"

"I'm one of Dr. Lecter's patients," the man said proudly. He then looked at Will, smiled wider, and said, "Isn't he just the *best* ? I swear, I've never had a better psychiatrist."

Will blinked.

Hannibal said, "Will is not my patient."

"But I've seen him in your office," Franklyn protested.

Will narrowed his eyes. Franklyn had sessions on Monday. Will never came into the office on Monday– he had to teach. Franklyn was stalking Hannibal. Or, at the very least, staking out his office. Judging from the way Hannibal put his hand on Will's lower back, he realized it too.

"Will is my husband," Hannibal said.

Will smiled. He leaned into Hannibal's side, enjoying the way the little man's gaze shifted between Will, Hannibal, Max, and into utter *despair*. "Oh," he mumbled.

He looked away from the sad little man into a pair of dark, hungry eyes. "Tobias Budge," the man said. "I own a string shop in Baltimore." The man who inappropriately cornered Florence and Stacey. Will narrowed his eyes. Budge beamed at Will.

Franklyn bounced back quickly. "Tobias is my best friend. He's a *very* talented musician."

"I am Hannibal Lecter. This is my husband, Will Graham," Hannibal said. He shook the man's hand.

"Do you play?" Tobias asked. He leered at Hannibal.

Like recognizing like, Will realized distantly.

"I do," Hannibal replied evenly. "I'm rather partial to the harpsichord."

"Ah, a gem of an instrument. I prefer the classics myself. Violin. Viola," Budge continued. His eyes went back to Will. Hungry. Will groaned in his head. The man felt *seen* by Will, and he wanted more. "Do you play, Will?"

Will didn't return his smile. "I dabble. Hannibal is the musician in our family."

"Oh?" Budge asked. His gaze flicked to Hannibal. Assessing the competition. Will watched Tobias dismiss Hannibal as a threat. He turned back to Will. "I would love to hear you play sometime. Your hands are beautiful; I am sure they produce wonderful music."

The air seemed to get sucked right out of the room. Budge didn't have a subtle bone in his body. The socialites around them knew it, too. They didn't all *like* Hannibal, but at the very least, he had their respect. They watched Hannibal, eager to see how he would respond to the blatant flirtation directed at his husband. Three people in the room knew they weren't talking about actual music. The rest of them picked up on the danger regardless, sitting on the edge of their proverbial seats.

Franklyn seemed to be the only oblivious one. "If he says he doesn't play, he probably doesn't. He doesn't seem like the type." He critically examined Will from head to foot. In his head, nobody would be the perfect match for Hannibal. But, then, it would be hard to matchmake for a person on a pedestal– completely out of mortal reach.

"I'm afraid my Will is rather shy," Hannibal said. He curled his arm tighter around Will's waist, making him take a step closer. Will took the cue for what it was and snuggled demurely into Hannibal's side. "He doesn't often play in the company of others."

Will smiled coyly at his husband from under his lashes. "I'd rather listen to you play, darlin'. Your compositions are breathtaking."

Hannibal smiled and bent an inch to chastely kiss Will. They smiled sweetly at one another after parting. Will enjoyed the moment. Breathing Hannibal's air, enjoying his husband's possessive happiness.

Judging from the tightness around Tobias's eyes, he wasn't happy about it. "That's a shame," he said. "Why hide your own talent in your husband's shadow?"

Will laughed. "I'm not hiding." He focused his attention completely on Hannibal, fueled by the older man's open adoration. "I just love my husband more than anything. I'm happiest when *he's* happiest."

"You spoil me," Hannibal said, dropping another kiss on Will's head.

"You deserve it," Will murmured, meaning every word, "you make me happier than I've ever been. Life was boring, before you."

Komeda *aww'd.* "You two are just *precious*."

"How, um, how long have you been together?" Franklyn asked nervously. His eyes went to the baby. Will watched him weave a story to himself. Maybe he thought Will baby-trapped Hannibal somehow. Like Max's glowing forehead didn't make that impossible. It took two, after all.

Hannibal hummed. "We've been married for fourteen years," he said. "Together, for sixteen."

Franklyn's shoulders sagged. "Oh," he said.

"Where did you meet?" Samantha Barnes asked, butting in for more of the gossip she loved so much.

“Florence,” Hannibal said.

Komeda cooed. “Is that why you named your daughter Florence?”

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed. “Will and I met along the shores of the Arno. I was painting, and he stumbled right into me.”

“He accidentally tripped me and I fell into the water,” Will agreed with a happy laugh.

“I felt so bad I invited him back to my home for dinner to make up for it,” Hannibal continued. He kissed Will’s forehead. “And the rest, they say, is history.”

“Are you Italian, then, Will?” Samantha asked.

Will shook his head. “No, I was born in Louisiana, actually. I was doing a bit of soul-searching after my dad passed, touring around Europe.” Will put on his extra-sweet smile and softly said, “I never did find that soul, but I definitely found my heart.”

The younger woman who liked true crime *squealed*. “Oh my *God*, that is *adorable!* ” she nearly shouted.

A few people chuckled good-naturedly. She blushed and gushed and started rambling on about being able to find anyone her age who knew how to properly *romance a girl*. Will liked her– she had spirit.

Budge had to ruin the new conversation by staring at Will and saying, “Unfortunately, some people just don’t know when there’s something better out there. They can be blind to better opportunities right in front of them. There *are* men with romantic hearts that are alive and well.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Will deadpanned, “I think the problem lies with people who can’t take a hint.”

Oops.

Will let the veneer of the demure husband slide to his shoulders. The ugly, angry parts of him reared their heads. Just a little. Will couldn’t *stand* this man. Hannibal cocked his head curiously at Will’s side, not sure of the reason for Will’s shift in tone.

Before Budge could come up with a properly eerie response to fill up the space that Will’s harsh words cut through the conversation, a little body wiggled into the circle between Hannibal and Will. A warm hand wrapped around his elbow and a head of curls bent to kiss Max.

“*Dad, that’s the creepy man from earlier*,” Florence said unhappily. "*Why are you talking to him*?"

Hannibal frowned. He adjusted Florence’s sleeve, amber eyes serious. “*Who,* mažoji? *What happened?”*

"Our new musician friend decided to wait outside the bathroom for Stacey and Flo. He got too close to them, " Will said.

"*He had a crush on you, Papa, until Dad got in his face,* " Florence grumped.

Arno, who squeezed between Hannibal and Florence, said, "*He scared Flo earlier, Papa*." His tone was exactly that of a child tattling on another. But, unlike most children, the child in this case was a man who would end up very dead, very soon, as a result.

Hannibal's eyes went flat. Dangerous. "*And why wasn't this mentioned before?* "

"*There wasn't time, between taking care of Stacey and him creepily making advances at me*," Will defended. "*I was going to mention it in the car.*"

Hannibal pursed his lips. He fixed Arno's hair again, struggling to keep his person-suit stitched up tight. An outsider wouldn't notice, but Will saw the tenseness to his gait and the stiffness in Hannibal's fingers. Hannibal's eyebrow ticked. Rudeness, he abhorred. Uncleanliness made his lip curl and lateness made his eyes narrow. Hurting his children? Hurting his children was a one-way ticket straight to the butcher's block.

Or, the Ripper's table, Will supposed.

"I don't suppose you have a business card, Mr. Budge?" Hannibal suddenly asked.

Budge, taken off-guard by the quick switch from Italian to English, said, "I do. The opera is a place where I frequently meet potential clients."

"My harpsichord could use new strings," Hannibal said, with a smile. "I don't suppose you carry any?"

"Of course," Budge replied. He fished a business card out of his breast pocket. "I have the finest cat-gut strings in all of Baltimore." Hannibal took the card with a hum.

Florence, eyes-hard, said, "Only cowards hurt animals."

Budge's lips pulled into a frown. "It is–"

"No, she's right," Will drawled. "I *hate* violence against animals. They can't defend themselves. I'm more partial to dogs, but *cat-gut* ?" Will shook his head, genuinely disgusted. Why people would go for animal parts (and probably torture said animals along the way, in this case) for a handful of strings, Will would never understand.

Arno sniffled. "That man hurts *cats*, Papa?" he asked sadly.

Papa kissed Arno's head. "So it would seem."

Budge, flustered, said, "Cat-gut strings are–"

"Inhumane!" true crime girl cut in. She marched right up to Budge and poked him in the chest. "You're horrible!"

Automatically siding with Hannibal, the rest of the socialites chimed in their agreements. Even Komeda teared up, talking about her three cats and how she couldn't imagine something so terrible. She and Samantha put their differences aside to rip into Budge. Budge quickly excused himself from the conversation, scurrying for the exit with Franklyn in his shadow. Properly disgraced from the opera house. At least that meant they weren't likely to see him the next time Hannibal insisted on a family outing.

Before things could properly calm down, Will's pocket buzzed. He handed Max off to Hannibal, who smiled when he saw the name flash on Will's phone screen.

"Sorry," Will said to the group of people still around them, "it's work." He stepped away from the socialites, and put the phone to his ear.

Will didn't even get to say hello before Jack spoke, "It's him, Will." His voice came out in a rush; caught somewhere between horror and excitement. That special tone of voice that Jack only got once a year. "It's the Ripper."

Will turned, caught his husband's eager eye, and asked, "Where's the scene?"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late update-- I've had a lot of weird stuff going on at work and just couldn't find the motivation to finish this chapter the last two weeks.
Hobbs never becomes the Shrike in this verse because Hannibal doesn't do the field Kabuki with Cassie Boyle. So he's the "Campus Cannibal". This is where the plot starts to pick up a bit, so hopefully new chapter very soon! I'm super excited for the next one. A Ripper scene and some ~drama~.

Comments make my day! :D

Presents and the Call

Chapter Summary

Woah I'm alive?

Update before 2023??? It's more likely than you think!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stood in knee-high grass, watching FBI agents circle the body. From far away, they looked like fireflies. Their headlamps and lights illuminated the bottom of Hannibal's art, throwing shadows from the body far and wide.

Jack stomped up to him. Somehow, Jack looked both furious and eager. The other man would never admit it, but he was happiest when there was a new Ripper case. Not because of the dead bodies or the suffering Hannibal brought, but because there was hope to catch him.

"Graham," Jack said by way of greeting. "Scene is ready for you."

Will nodded and dutifully followed Jack away from the cars and closer to the circling agents. The body was high off the ground, tied up in the trees.

Will shoved his hands into the pocket of his heavy coat and stared upwards at the body. He hummed. He didn't recognize it.

But, it would be hard pressed for most people to identify him. The body's exposed muscle and viscera was slightly frosted in the winter chill; the light dusting of ice sparkled in the FBI's lights.

The corpse was in two dozen pieces. Some of them wrapped up in paper and ribbons, others were left exposed to the chill. Frost gathered on rugged skin or exposed muscle, the ice crystals glowing in the angents' lights. Christmas ornaments were interspersed with pieces of the corpse.

Will let the pendulum drop.

The man is rude. He swears and glares and tries to touch something that does not belong to him.

As penance, I take his eyes and his tongue. I rip his lungs and guts from his body. I remove every finger from the palms of his hands.

I do this while he is alive.

He screams and begs.

I enjoy this.

When he dies, I cut him into pieces. I killed this man because of his rudeness, but I butcher him to give my love a gift.

I wrap his arms and legs and little pieces in paper. Each a present. The head is tied with a ribbon, his mouth full of roses. A Valentine hidden among Christmas presents.

I hang him with fishing wire, because I know it will elicit a laugh. He is hung with baubles and ornaments, because it makes my children happy. He is carefully wrapped, certain parts hidden away, because that is the fun of this game.

One present will mean more than the rest. That is why it is the only one wrapped in gold. It hangs in the middle, because I want it to be opened first.

This is my design.

Will breathed deep as his senses came back to him. His cheeks flushed, and not from the cold.

Will remembered him, now. He never learned the man's name, but he shouted homophobic things at them from across the street a few weeks back. He got closer and tried to hit Will. Will didn't know how Hannibal found him, but he probably should have seen this coming.

"Well?" Jack asked, appearing at Will's side and startling him.

Will stuffed his hands back into his pockets and stared up at the body. “There’s something different about the golden present,” he said. He nodded to the one in the middle; the centerpiece of Hannibal’s tableau.

“Present?” Jack echoed. “Is this some kind of Christmas gift?”

“Yes,” Will agreed. He moved closer, standing under the carefully wrapped limbs and glass ornaments. “The Ripper left us a gift. We should open it.”

Jack cussed under his breath. He yelled at Zeller to get a ladder. Fifteen minutes later, the golden present was carefully placed down on a tarp. Katz cut it open, careful not to disturb the contents.

Inside of the golden present was an arm.

A pale arm, almost delicate.

“This one’s been dead a while,” Katz said, carefully removing the arm from the golden packaging. She frowned, poking at the flesh. She looked up at Jack. “Pretty sure this is a woman’s hand.”

“So?” Jack asked.

“Well, there is a, um, a penis hanging over there,” Zeller said, pointing in the direction of the amputated organ. “And the skin color is different. From the pieces that aren’t wrapped or skinless, the victim’s skin is really tan.”

“This is someone else’s arm,” Katz agreed.

“How many bodies are we looking at?” Jack asked grimly.

“Just two,” Will replied. He looked up at the still-hanging presents. “This arm is the only piece that doesn’t belong. The rest of the pieces will be from the same body.”

Will stood, moving to walk around the golden-wrapped arm and examine the rest of the

presents. They were all light enough to move in the wind. Will wryly wondered how much meat must have been taken from the body. Most of his muscles and organs, to be certain.

He glanced back at the arm.

Then– a phone began to ring.

Will frowned up at the remaining green and red presents. One of them glowed slightly, vibrating as the default ringtone wafted over the breeze.

"Someone cut that down!" Jack barked. The phone stopped ringing right after, only to immediately start up again.

Will hung back with Zeller as Katz cut the phone down. Once it was safely on the ground, she unwrapped it with steady fingers.

The phone was small– outdated. The blue device slid across the paper as it rang.
Will watched as Jack nodded to Beverly, and she hit the answer button.

There was nothing for a minute, then a frantic, "*Jack? Jack! Oh, God, I found him, Jack! He's going to kill me!*"

Will closed his eyes as Miriam Lass's begging got louder and louder. It was a familiar ache. He didn't want her to die– it wasn't her fault she was sharp and good at her job. Hannibal's sloppiness and a bit of bad luck led her to his office.

Miriam had no way of knowing her professor lingered near the back of the room– his body hidden behind curtains and the lighting.

Will watched her see Hannibal's sketches, and Will moved without thinking.

Miriam turned on Hannibal. She drew her gun as Will bashed her over the head with one of Hannibal's ostentatious elk statues. Her bleeding temple seeped onto one of Hannibal's rugs.

Hannibal looked down at her limp body, and clicked his tongue. "*Well*," he'd murmured. "*No need to take out your anger on the rug, darling.*"

It took a few months to get recordings Hannibal wanted. He ensured that they contained no background noise– nothing that could be used to track the recordings back to the rural barn surrounded by nothing but trees.

Will's gut churned.

Hannibal wanted to keep her alive.

Brainwash her until she could be used as a tool against Chilton– his preferred patsy.

But Will couldn't stomach it.

She wasn't a bad person. Miriam Lass deserved a proper burial. They didn't eat her; though Hannibal cut her down to manageable pieces. Her family would get to bury her, just like Will wanted, though they'd have to do so one puzzle piece at a time.

Guilty wasn't the right word to describe what Will felt about Miriam's death. She possessed that rare sort of hyper-intelligence when it came to reading people that so long as she remained in Jack's orbit her death would remain an inevitability.

The silence that hung after the call ended was thick. Nobody wanted to breathe. Will broke it.

"It's her arm," Will said into the silence. "Miriam's."

One of the agents from her class vomited his dinner up by the cars. Jack looked ashen, shouting orders to anyone who would listen.

They would try to trace the call, but it wouldn't matter. The call would be routed back to a non-existent address in Brazil.

Impossible to trace or replicate.

"Is she alive?" Jack demanded.

Price pursed his lips. Slowly, without making eye contact with Jack, he shook his head. "Arm shows signs of being frozen as well as rigor mortis. It's– she's," he corrected hastily, "been gone for a while."

Beverly stood and put her hand on Jack’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, Jack,” she said quietly.

Jack stormed away, slamming his fist into one of the nearby trees. His head bowed forward, his shoulders shaking with grief.

Were Will a better man, he would offer them comfort of some kind. But he wasn’t, so he didn’t.

Will stood in the new snow and stared up at the twinkling presents. They were beautiful in the moonlight, and he knew just what to get Hannibal to repay him for the gesture.

Chapter End Notes

Heeeeyyyyy...
Sorry it's a little short. I've been trying to rediscover my love of writing for a few months.;; Got dumped by a longterm writing partner, and I took it hard. It's not easy to resume working on fics/pieces from that time of my life
Also no beta so sorry 🙃;;
Happy New Year! ✨
See you next time.

Flipping

Chapter Summary

They bone lol

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal woke when the door downstairs opened. He glanced at the bedside clock, the time indicating that it was nearly two in the morning. He smiled into his pillow, excitement curling in his stomach.

He always looked forward to Will's reactions when he killed.

It wasn't long before Will darkened the doorway of their bedroom, his curly hair in disarray. He closed the door quietly behind him, stripping out of his clothes from the opera at the room's entrance.

Hannibal sat up, the warm blankets pooling around his waist. He didn't say anything. He waited for Will to come to him.

His husband near-silently padded across the plush carpet. Will knelt on the edge of the bed, and Hannibal swore he could see Will's cheeks flushed in the moonlight. It spread down his bare chest.

Aware of Max's sleeping form a few feet away, Hannibal carefully wrapped his arms around Will. The younger man shook slightly, burrowing his head into Hannibal's neck. Hannibal knew skin-on-skin contact would help. Will was touch-starved as a child. Tactile contact was the best way to get him to open up or to calm him down.

Hannibal cupped Will's nape with one hand, and the other brushed over his husband's lower back. He absently traced the notches on Will's spine as he trembled. Will smelled equal parts distressed and aroused. Not an uncommon combination in their bedroom, but still one Hannibal had to navigate carefully.

Eventually, Will leaned up, and snagged Hannibal's lips in a sweet kiss. Will's lips were soft and moist. Slightly chilled by the harsh winter weather outside.

"Hold me," Will murmured into Hannibal's mouth. After a moment of hesitation, he tacked on a, "Please."

Hannibal shifted his weight, levering Will backwards so the smaller man was under him. Will's head rested on the decorative blanket that hung horizontally over the foot of their bed. There were tears on his cheeks, his eyes firmly closed, and his breath quick.

"What happened?" Hannibal murmured. He cupped Will's cheek.

Will shook his head. He kissed the palm Hannibal had on his face, spreading his legs further apart.

Hannibal was never one to refuse an invitation, so he settled between Will's thighs. They embraced, faces buried in the other's neck as they shared breath and relaxed into the mattress.

Quietly, into the join of Hannibal's throat and shoulder, Will whispered, "It's hard sometimes."

"What is, darling?" Hannibal asked.

Will sighed. "Being around that many people. They were all… *hurting* ."

Ah. Yes, that made sense. Hannibal's lovely husband was an empath, after all. He couldn't be in a field of mourning and distressed FBI agents without bringing some of their sorrow home with him. Will left the opera four hours ago. All those rioting emotions would be too much for anyone after so long, especially someone as gifted as Will.

Hannibal leaned up on his elbows, staring down into Will's pretty eyes. The dark seas within them were near black in the darkness. Hannibal could hardly make out the blue at all. "Let me help," he whispered.

Will nodded his head quickly. He met Hannibal's gaze and held it.

They didn't do this often, but it became a routine sometime along the line. When Will needed to feel *nothing* , it was a service Hannibal could provide.

Hannibal let go of the leash he kept on himself. He wore a polite mask at all times, even when alone. There was no telling when a rat would let themselves into his home or peer into one of his windows. Letting the soulless monster within him stare into a pig's eyes was sure to rouse suspicion.

Will's body quaked beneath him. His breath caught, and his eyes glazed over. Hannibal watched, delighted, as the sorrow and angst bled out of Will's features. His empathy latched on to Hannibal's cavernous emptiness. Will's features smoothed. His tears dried.

With a deep sigh, Will leaned back into the mattress. The tension escaped from him, carried off by his exhalation.

"Better?" Hannibal prompted kindly. His cock throbbed against Will's thigh. There was something heady about seeing himself reflected back. That dull, shark-eyed look suited Will beautifully.

Will hummed in agreement. His hands wandered into Hannibal's hair. While his eyes remained at half-mast, he watched Hannibal's monster as it continued to watch him.

“Hold me,” Will said again. This time, without the underlying neediness of a Will drowning in grief. This time, there was a different sort of need lacing his words.

Hannibal captured Will’s mouth with his own. He didn't hesitate; nights like these always ended the same way. They bit at one another, hands digging into skin and tongues battling for dominance.

Whenever Will mirrored Hannibal, their sex wasn’t a gentle thing.

It became a fight.

Will’s thighs tightened as he braced himself to attack. Hannibal moved quicker, cruelly pinching a nipple with his nails. Warmth beaded under his fingers, blood tacky on Will’s sweaty skin.

Will hissed in pain, and tried to roll them over.

Hannibal bit down on Will’s neck, capturing one of his husband’s hands before abandoning Will’s chest to snag the other. Hannibal flipped Will over, pinning him on his belly.

Will bared his teeth at Hannibal. While on his belly, his face half-buried in blankets, Will couldn't bite Hannibal. Hamnibal knew from experience that Will *would* take a chunk out of him if given the opportunity. Hannibal settled between Will’s thighs, and pinned Will’s wrists above his head. Lowly, into Will’s ear, he murmured, “Hush, or you’ll wake the baby.”

Will’s lips rolled over his teeth, but his thighs stopped trying to squeeze the life out of Hannibal.

Will didn’t fight as Hannibal yanked his hips up and slid down his body. He tensed, until Hannibal laved his tongue over Will’s most sensitive place. Will sucked in a gasp, his back arching.

Hannibal chuckled, shifting back and biting harshly into the meat of Will's ass.

Will bucked. His hands scrambled for purchase.

Then Max made a tiny little snuffling noise.

Will froze, his head jerking to stare at the crib where their son slept.

Hannibal chuckled when Max didn't make further noise. He moved to his knees, and lined himself up with Will's hole. They had sex right before the opera, so Will was still pleasantly loose.

Still, with no lube save for spit, Will stifiled a cry of pain in the sheets as Hannibal buried himself to the hilt.

Will would tear– likely bleed.

Hannibal didn't care. It was what Will needed. The pain would ground him in the coming days. Every time he felt a twinge in his lower back or his ass, he would remember that he belonged to Hannibal. That pain would distract him from the thick grief of the agents around him.

Will bit the blankets, the tears reappearing on his cheeks as Hannibal slowly thrust in and out of his body. He was tight. And dry. It hurt both of them, truthfully. Hannibal grinned at the harsh chafe of Will's insides.

Hannibal tangled his hand in Will's hair, wrenching his head back and meeting his gaze.

Will's jaw went slack, the back and forth of pain and pleasure looping inside his head. Will felt Hannibal's pain. His pleasure. And his own.

Hannibal reached beneath Will, tugging on his length in time with his thrusts. Will softed from the pain of entry, but it didn't take long to get him enthusiastic and damp.

Will came first, moaning into the sheets as Hannibal used his body and drew him to oversensitivity.

As Will's body clenched around him, Hannibal knew he wouldn't last. He let go, content to flood Will's body and fuck them both through the aftermath.

Hannibal rolled them once again, slipping out of Will and tugging at him until they were both back at the head of the bed with their heads on their pillows and the blankets covering their bodies.

"I needed that," Will grumbled into Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal chuckled. "I know, mylimasis." He tugged on an errant curl. Will folded himself closer, resting his head on Hannibal's chest and throwing a leg over Hannibal's waist.

Will sighed happily, content in his pain. "Thanks," he said.

"Whatever for?" Hannibal mused.

"Getting me out of their heads," Will said. He yawned. "They're sticky. Like glue."

Hannibal smiled. "I am delighted to help you shake off the ghosts of others," he soothed. "You needn't thank me, Will. I like your head glue-free. It is as much for me as it is for you."

Will chuckled. He bit down lightly on Hannibal’s skin. Warm pain radiated from the spot of the attack. That warmth swelled in Hannibal’s heart.

Ah– how he loved Will.

His sweet, violent boy.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's a short one.
I didn't want to abandon this for as long as I did last time between updates :p

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!